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PETER PARAGON

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# PETER PARAGON

A Tale of Youth

BY  
JOHN PALMER



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PETER PARAGON



# I

PETER might justly have complained that his birth was too calmly received. For Peter's mother accepted him without demur. Women who nurse themselves more thoroughly than they nurse their babies will incredulously hear that Mrs. Paragon made little difference in her life on Peter's account until within four hours of his coming. Nevertheless Peter was a healthy baby, shapeless and mottled.

Mrs. Paragon was tall and fair, with regular features and eyes set well apart. They looked at you candidly, and you were aware of their friendly interest. They perfectly expressed the simplicity and peace of her character. She was mild and immovable; with a strength that was felt by all who dealt with her, though she rarely asserted it. She had the slow, deep life of a mother.

Mr. Paragon was at all points contrasted. He was short, and already at this time he was stout. He had had no teaching; but he was not an ignorant man. He was naturally of an active mind; and he had read extensively the literature that suited his habit of reflection.

Mr. Paragon was the son of a small tradesman, and had by the death of his parents been thrown

upon the London streets. After ten years he had emerged as a managing clerk.

Had Mr. Paragon been well treated he might have reached his fortieth year sunny and charitable, with a cheerful faith in people and institutions. But living a celibate life, insufficiently fed, shabbily clothed, and never doubting his mental superiority to prosperous employers, he had naturally adopted extremely bitter views of the world.

Surmounting a shelf of Mr. Paragon's favourite books was a plaster bust of Bradlaugh. The shelf itself included Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, Godwin's *Political Justice*, and the works of Voltaire in forty English volumes. Mr. Paragon talked the language of Godwin's philosophic day. Priests, kings, aristocracies, and governments were his familiar bogies. He went every Sunday to a Labour church where extracts from Shelley and Samuel Butler were read by the calendar; and he was a successful orator of a powerful group of rebels among the railwaymen.

Mr. Paragon was more Falstaff than Cassius to the eye. There was something a little ludicrous in Mr. Paragon, with legs well apart, hands deep in his trousers, demonstrating that religion was a device of government for the deception of simple men, and that property was theft.

Mrs. Paragon loved her husband, and ignored his opinions. He on his side found rest after the bitterness of his early years in the shelter of her

wisdom. His anarchism became more and more an intellectual indulgence. Gradually the edge was taken from his temper. He began to enjoy his grievances now that they no longer pinched him. His charity, in a way that charity has, extended with his circumference. He was earning £4 a week, and he had in his wife a housekeeper who could make £4 cover the work of £6. Mrs. Paragon did not, like many of her friends, overtask an incompetent drudge at £10 a year. She saved her money, and halved her labour. Ends met; and things were decently in order. Mr. Paragon was happy; insured against reasonable disaster; with sufficient energy and spirit left at the end of a day's work to take himself seriously as a citizen and a man.

There were times when Mr. Paragon took himself very seriously indeed. On the evening of the day when Mr. Samuel, curate of the parish, called to urge Mrs. Paragon to have Peter christened, Mr. Paragon talked so incisively that only his wife could have guessed how little he intended.

"No priests," he said. "That's final."

He looked in fierce dispute at Mrs. Paragon; but meeting her calm eyes, looked hastily away at Peter, who was sleeping by the fire in a clothes basket.

Mrs. Paragon was dishing up the evening meal; and Mr. Paragon saw that a reasonably large pie-dish had appeared from the oven, from which arose a browned pyramid of sliced pota-

toes. The kitchen was immediately filled with a savour only to be associated with Mr. Paragon's favourite supper.

Mrs. Paragon ignored the eagerness with which he drew to the table. Shepherd's pie is a simple thing, but not as Mrs. Paragon made it. Mr. Paragon, as he spooned generously into the steaming dish, had forgotten Mr. Samuel till Mrs. Paragon reminded him.

"Mr. Samuel," she said, "is only doing his duty."

Mr. Paragon washed down a large mouthful of pie with small beer. Another mouthful was cooling upon the end of his fork.

"Who made it his duty?" he asked.

Mrs. Paragon never answered these rhetorical questions; and Mr. Paragon added, after a mouthful:

"There are honest jobs."

"Yes, dear; but Mr. Samuel believes in christening."

"Perhaps he does. Mr. Samuel believes that the animals went in two by two."

There was a long pause. Then Mrs. Paragon left the table to serve a large suet pudding studded with raisins.

She dealt with it in silence. Mr. Paragon, as always on these occasions when they were pulling different ways, felt as if he were trying to make waves in a pool by blowing upon the surface. He could never more than superficially ruffle the spirit



of his wife. He was obscurely aware that she had inexhaustible reserves.

The meal concluded without further conversation; but, when Mr. Paragon had eaten more than was good for him, he began to feel that impulsive necessity to be generous which invariably overtook him sooner or later in his differences with Mrs. Paragon. He looked at her amiably:

“I see it like this,” he said. “Mr. Samuel thinks he’s right. But he’s not going to stuff it into my boy. I’m an independent man, and I think for myself.”

“Yes, dear,” said Mrs. Paragon. “I don’t know whether Mr. Samuel is right or wrong. I want to do the best for Peter.”

Mr. Paragon looked sharply at his wife. She was sitting comfortably beside the clothes basket, resting for the first time since seven o’clock in the morning. There was not the remotest suggestion that she was resisting him. Nevertheless Mr. Paragon was aware of a passive antagonism. He was sure she wanted Peter to be christened; he was also sure that none of his very reasonable views affected her in the least degree.

He was right. Mrs. Paragon liked to hear her husband talk. But logic did not count in her secure world. She knew only what she wanted and felt. Calm and unutterable sense was all her genius; and Mr. Paragon felt, rather than knew, that his books and opinions were feathers in the scale.

"If Peter isn't christened," Mrs. Paragon softly pursued, "he'll be getting ideas into his head. I want him to start like other boys. Let him find out for himself whether Mr. Samuel's right or wrong. If you keep Peter away from Church he'll think there's something wrong with it."

"Something wrong with it!" exploded Mr. Paragon. "I'll tell you what's wrong with it."

Mr. Paragon proceeded to do so at some length. Mrs. Paragon was quite content to see Mr. Paragon spending his force. Mr. Paragon talked for a long time, ending in firm defiance.

"I don't see a son of mine putting pennies into the plate for the clergyman's Easter Holiday Fund," he noisily concluded. "When my son is old enough to read Genesis, he'll be old enough to read the *Origin of Species* and the works of Voltaire."

Thereafter he sat for the rest of the evening by the kitchen fire reading his favourite volume of the forty — the adventures of Candide and of Pangloss.

But for a few moments the reading was interrupted, for Peter suddenly woke and yelled for food. As Mrs. Paragon sat with the child, Mr. Paragon had never felt more conscious of her serenity, of her immovable strength, of her eternity. He watched her over the pages of his book.

When he again looked into the adventures of

Candide they had lost something of their zest. He wondered between the lines whether the patriarch of Ferney would have written with quite so definite an assurance and clarity if once he had looked into the eyes of Mrs. Paragon.

A few days later Peter was christened at the local church.

## II

MIRANDA was thirteen years old, and she lived in the next house. She was Peter's best friend. They had soon discovered that their ideas as to a good game were similar, and for many years they had played inseparably. Already Mrs. Paragon and Mrs. Smith had decided to open a way through the wall that divided the two gardens.

To-day this breach in the wall had been filled in by Miranda with packing-cases and an old chair. Miranda stood beside her defences of the breach with sword and shield on the summit of a wall less than nine inches across.

At the wall's foot was Peter. He was his favourite hero — Shakespeare's fifth Henry.

“How yet resolves the governor of the town?  
This is the latest parle we will admit.”

The moment had come for Miranda to descend from the wall and deliver the keys of the city. But Miranda this morning refused the usual programme. Peter, hearing that the text of Shakespeare would not on this occasion be followed, resolved that none of the horrors of war should be spared.

He came to the attack with a battering-ram.

“Saint George! Saint George!” he shouted, and the ram rushed forward.

“France! France!” Miranda screamed, and unexpectedly emptied a pail of cold water upon Peter’s head.

Peter left the ram and swiftly retreated.

Both parties were by this time lost to respect of consequences. Into Peter’s mind there suddenly intruded Shakespeare’s vision of himself.

“ . . . And at his heels,  
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire  
Crouch for employment.”

Fire! Obviously this was the retort.

Nothing in the world burns so fiercely as a well-dried bundle of straw. Within half a minute of the match there was literally a roar of flame, ascending into the crevices of Miranda’s breach. She rushed into the smoke, swayed, and leaped blindly into her father’s marrow-bed.

Her father’s marrows had been tenderly nursed to the threshold of perfection. It was a portion of his routine to come into the garden after breakfast to inspect, feel, weigh in his hands, and liberally to discourse upon marrows. But nothing at that moment could sober Miranda. She did not care.

Peter was for the moment awed into inaction by a fire which burned more rapidly than he had intended; but he climbed at last upon the wall, saw Miranda prone among the marrows, and,

surging with conquest, leaped furiously upon her.

Peter was more complicated than Miranda. Miranda did not yet know that she had ruined her father's marrows. She was mercifully made to feel and to know one thing at a time; and at this moment she felt that the only thing in the world that mattered was to kill Peter.

But Peter realised in mid-air that he, too, would soon be standing amid extended ruins of the marrow-bed. His moment of indecision was fatal. Spreading his legs, to avoid a particularly fine vegetable, he fell headlong. Miranda was swiftly upon him, and they rolled among the shoots and blossoms. Peter forgot his scruples. He drew the dagger at his belt, and stabbed.

Triumph was stillborn. He felt himself suddenly lifted from the marrow-bed, and was next aware of some vigorous blows indelicately placed.

Mrs. Smith had returned from marketing, and looked for her daughter. The fire was not difficult to perceive; it was roaring to heaven. Nor was Miranda easily overlooked, for she was in her death-agony.

Miranda calmly stood by, waiting until Mrs. Smith was free to deal with her. Miranda was always sensible. Her turn would come.

Mrs. Smith suddenly dropped Peter into the marrows, and turned the garden hose upon Peter's fire. Peter, scrambling to his feet, watched her with dry, contemptuous eyes. The fire was furiously crackling, shooting up spark and

flame. It was beautiful and splendid. Peter found himself wondering in his humiliation how Mrs. Smith could so callously extinguish it.

"I never saw such children," said Mrs. Smith. "I don't know what your father will say, Miranda."

Mrs. Smith was a hard-working wife. She had no time for thought or imagination. She dealt with Miranda, and children generally, by rote. "Mischief" was something that children loved, for which they were punished. It was recognised as the sort of thing serious people avoided.

"I don't know what your father will say, Miranda." The phrase was automatic with Mrs. Smith. Miranda knew that her father would say less than her mother.

"It was my fire," said Peter, smouldering wickedly; "and they are my marrows."

"I wasn't talking to you," said Mrs. Smith; "you'd better go away."

At this point Mrs. Paragon appeared above the wall.

"Peter," she said, "you might have burned the house down."

How different, Peter thought, was his mother from Mrs. Smith. His mother understood. Obviously it was wrong to burn the house down. He saw the point. His mother hadn't any theories about mischief.

Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Paragon exchanged some sentiments on the waywardness of children, and

the fire being quenched, Miranda was kept indoors for the rest of the day. Peter wistfully wandered between meals about the scene of his morning's adventure. He was burning with a sense of wrong. He admitted his fault. He had imperilled the house, and he had helped to destroy his neighbour's marrows. But he felt that Mrs. Smith's view of things was perverse, and that his humiliation had been out of all proportion to his offence. At the thought of Miranda's imprisonment he savagely flushed.

Peter ended the day in a softer mood. In the evening he had seen Mr. Smith inspecting the ruins of his marrow bed. He knew exactly what Mr. Smith was feeling. He remembered how he himself had felt when Mrs. Smith had made him destroy a platform he had built in the chestnut tree at the foot of the garden.

Peter dashed through the gap in the wall. Mr. Smith, a kind little man with the temperament of an angel, looked him sorrowfully in the face. Peter's contrition was manifest and perfectly understood.

"Bit of a mess, eh!" said Mr. Smith with an affectation that it did not matter.

"I'm sorry," said Peter. "It's a shame. I'm awfully sorry."

"That's all right," said Mr. Smith. Then he added cheerfully: "Your father will put it right."

Mr. Smith, as a gardener, was the pupil of Mr. Paragon. But though he had complete confidence



in his instructor, his belief that anyone would ever be able to make anything of the mangled vegetation between them was obviously pretended for Peter's sake; and Peter knew this as well as he.

Peter brushed away the necessary tears, and was about to obey an impulse to grip Mr. Smith's hand in sympathy, when Mrs. Smith called her husband sharply to supper.

Peter watched him disappear into the house with a sudden conviction that life was difficult. Already he heard the voice, thin and penetrating, of Mrs. Smith, raised in a discourse upon mischief.

Peter went in to his mother to tell her that he had apologised to Mr. Smith. He knew it would please her, and he also knew that his father, when he came home, would treat him with justice and understanding.

### III

MR. PARAGON was intended for a gardener. Had he been put upon the land at an early age he would neither have read books nor misread men: missing these opportunities for cynicism. He might have given his name to a chrysanthemum; and in ripe age have been full of meditated wisdom.

That Mr. Paragon at this time should sensibly have softened from the bitterness of his youth, was as much due to his large garden as to the influence of his wife and the effect of his prosperity. In his oldest and toughest clothes, working as English labourers worked before they had lost the secret, Mr. Paragon in no way resembled himself as member of the Labour church and a popular orator. The land absorbed him. He handled his spade in an indescribable, professional manner. You recognised the connoisseur who gathers in his palms the rarest china. You trust the man who by mere handling of an object can convey to you a sense of its value. In the same way you trusted Mr. Paragon with a spade. When Mr. Paragon took a cutting it always struck. When he selected seeds they always were fruitful. When he built a bank or rounded the

curve of a plot the result was always pleasing; and it came of itself, without reflection or difficulty. His gift was from nature. He had read no literature of gardening, and he had had no instruction. It was his charming privilege that a garden naturally blossomed under his hands.

Mrs. Paragon encouraged in every possible way her husband's love of the soil. Instinctively she divined that here he was best, and that here he was nearest herself. She was rarely without some of his flowers upon her table or pinned in her dress; and when on free days Mr. Paragon spent absorbed and laborious hours in the garden, Mrs. Paragon brought him cheese and beer, or tea and muffins, waiting at his elbow, interested and critical, while he discussed his plans, and asked her for advice which he never regarded. Had Mrs. Paragon neglected to feed him on these occasions he would not have noticed it, for he lost all count of time, and did not remember he was hungry till darkness came.

The most striking event of the year for Mr. Paragon and his house was the disposal of the season's rubbish. For twelve months it accumulated in a large hole, rotting in the rain and sun. Mr. Paragon dug it carefully into the soil at the end of the year, using it as a foundation for beds and banks. Usually the whole family assisted at the carting of the rubbish, with a box on wheels.

Peter was master of the convoy for carting the rubbish, and this was a military enterprise.

Miranda harassed his operations to the best of her ability. There were ambuscades, surprises, excursions and alarms.

Mr. Smith looked upon these operations with delight. He liked to see Mr. Paragon at work in the garden. He was proud of his successful neighbour, and took real pleasure in his competence. Moreover, he delighted in Peter's lively and interesting pretences. He would himself have led the attack upon Peter's convoy had he been free of Mrs. Smith's critical and contemptuous survey from the back-parlour window. Once he had actively taken part, and Mrs. Smith discovered him on all fours among the gooseberries, whence he had intended to create a diversion in Peter's rear. The rational frigidity with which she had come from the house to inquire what he imagined himself to be doing effectually prevented a repetition.

This afternoon there was a sharp encounter. This was a great moment in Peter's life owing to a brief, almost instantaneous, passage. Miranda met Peter's onslaught in her manly fashion, and soon they were locked in a desperate embrace. Suddenly Peter saw Miranda, as it seemed to him afterwards, for the first time. Her head was flung back, her cheeks crimsonly defiant, eyes shining, and hair scattered. For Peter it was a vision. He saw with uneasy terror that Miranda was beautiful. He had a quailing instinct to release her. It passed; but Miranda

met the look that came into his eyes and understood.

Who can say how softly and insensibly the change had been prepared? The books they had read; the strange couples that walked in the evening, curiously linked; the half-thoughts and surmises; queer little impulses of cruelty or tenderness that had passed between them — all were suddenly gathered up.

Peter realised the difference in his life that this moment had made for him in the late evening when Mr. Paragon was showing him a transit of Jupiter's third moon. Astronomy was a passion with Mr. Paragon. Astronomy overthrew Genesis and confounded religion. He had picked up cheap a six-inch reflecting telescope, and very frequently on fine evenings he probed the heavens for uninspected nebulæ, resolved double stars, mapped the surface of the moon, followed the fascinating mutation of the variables. Peter was very soon attracted and absorbed into his father's pastime. It had a breathless appeal for him. Awed and excited, he would project his mind into the measureless dark spaces. It was an adventure. Sometimes they would rise after midnight, and these were the times Peter loved best. The extreme quiet of the hour; loneliness upon earth giving a keener edge to the loneliness of heaven; the silence of the sleeping street lending almost a terror to the imagined silence of space; the secret flavour which crept into the enterprise from the

mere fact of waking while the world was asleep — all this gave to the situation, for Peter, an agreeable poignancy. Already he had discovered the appeal of Shelley, and he would repeat, pleasantly shuddering, passages of his favourite story:

“ I have made my bed  
In charnels and on coffins, where black death  
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,  
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings  
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,  
Thy messenger, to render up the tale  
Of what we are.”

The contrast was striking at these times between Peter and his father. For Mr. Paragon every double star resolved was a nail in the coffin of the Established Church; every wonder of the skies, inspected and verified, was a confirmation that society was built on stubble. But for Peter these excursions were food for fancy, the stuff of his dreams. He soared into space, not as Mr. Paragon intended, to discover the fraud of priests and kings, but to voyage with Shelley's Mab through the beautiful stars.

To-night the adventure had lost its edge. Nothing could be more exciting than a transit of Jupiter's third moon. The gradual approach of the tiny moon to the edge of the planet; its momentary extinction; the slow passage of the little shadow on the cloud-bright surface — the loveliness of this miniature play was sharpened for

Peter by knowledge of its immensity. Mr. Paragon gave up the telescope to Peter, and waited for breathless exclamation. But Peter was silent.

"Well," said Mr. Paragon, "can't you see it?"

"Yes," answered Peter indifferently.

"Perhaps the focus isn't quite right," suggested Mr. Paragon. He looked anxiously at Peter. Peter's indifference was unusual.

"It's all right, father, I can see it well. It's a black spot, and it's moving across."

"Wonderful!" said Mr. Paragon. "Think of it, Peter. Jupiter to-night is 60,000,000 miles away. It would easily hold 1300 of us, and it's got five moons. Looks as if it were made for lighting people to bed, don't it?"

"Yes, father," said Peter without interest.

Peter's fancy had suddenly flown to a passage in *Romeo and Juliet*, hitherto passed as absurd — something about cutting up Romeo into little stars. Peter smelled the wet earth and remembered Miranda. His imagination to-night refused the cold voyage into space. His father's figures, after which his mind had so often adventurously strained, were senseless.

His attention fell suddenly asleep at the telescope.

He realised that his father was asking him whether the transit was finished. He started into watchfulness and replied, still indifferently, that it was.

Mr. Paragon was mortified. He showed Peter

the wonders of the universe with a sort of proprietary satisfaction. He was proud of the size of Jupiter. He was personally exalted that the distance between the earth and the moon should be 240,000 miles. He had the pride of a conscientious cicerone; of the native who does the honours of his town. Peter to-night was disappointing.

"Well," said Mr. Paragon desperately, "what do you think of it?"

"It was very clear," Peter dutifully answered.

"There's not many lads your age," grumbled Mr. Paragon, "that have seen a transit of Jupiter's third moon."

"I know," said Peter, trying to feel excited and grateful. He had been looking forward to this evening for weeks. Why was he unable to enjoy it?

He repeated the question to himself as, half an hour later, he lay peacefully in bed. Then he found himself trying to remember the exact phrase about Romeo and the little stars.



## IV

PETER went daily to school in a dirty quarter of the town at least two miles from home. The house of the Paragons was upon the borders of the western or fashionable suburb of Hamingburgh. The school barely escaped the great manufacturing district to the east and south. It was a branch school of the great local foundation of King Edward VI. In the phrase of the local roughs, through whose courts and alleys he passed, Peter was a "grammar-cat."

He was supposed to go to school by the main road, where he was more or less under the protection of the police. For between the roughs and the grammar-cats was perpetual war; and to take the shorter route through the courts and alleys was an act of provocation. But Peter hankered after the forbidden road. His father, showing him the way to school, had stopped at a certain corner:

"This," he said, "is the shortest way; but you had better go round by the main road."

"Why?" Peter had asked.

"It's a nasty neighbourhood," said Mr. Paragon.

From that moment the shortest route became for Peter a North-West Passage. He would

stand at the fatal corner, looking up the street with its numberless small entries. Then, on a memorable day, he plunged.

First he had a soaring sense of his audacity. He felt he had left the laws behind. To win through now must entirely depend on his personal resource. At the doors of an immense factory men, women, and boys stood in line, waiting for the signal to blow them into work. Peter felt with a sinking at the stomach that he was an object of curiosity. He indeed looked strangely out of place in his neat suit of a small tar, with a sailor's knot foppishly fastened at the breast. The curious eyes of the waiting group followed him up the street. He was painfully aware, as he passed, that jocular remarks in sleepy midland slang were freely exchanged upon his apparition. Higher up the street a little rough stopped for a moment and stared, then started into an alley screaming.

The street was suddenly alive. Peter, flinging self-respect to the winds, started to run. A stone caught him smartly on the heel, and he thought he was lost. But another cry was almost immediately sounded. The helmet of a policeman came glinting up the street.

The roughs vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

Peter did not again venture into this district alone. At least a dozen of his school friends lived in the western suburb. He formed them

into a company, which daily took the forbidden way to school. Such was the origin of a feud whose deeds and passages would fill a chronicle. Peter's company was long remembered.

He soon made some striking discoveries. You cannot fight with a persistent enemy, even though his methods are not your methods, without touching his good points. It soon became evident that he and the roughs were less bitterly opposed than either of them was to the police. It was also clear that the men and women of the factory were "sports." They encouraged the boys quite impartially, and saw fair play.

Peter particularly remembered one morning of snow and dirt outside the big factory, when he slipped and fell, squirming with bitter pain of a snowball hard as ice in his ear. A stalwart woman with naked arms grimed with lead, picked him up and pressed him in a comfortable and friendly way against her bosom. She was in that dark hour an angel of strength and solace. The incident always lived in Peter's memory along with the faint smell in his nostrils of the factory grime.

On the morning after the transit of Jupiter's third moon Peter was late. His company had not waited. Peter had to pass his enemies alone.

He still wondered at the change which had come over him yesterday. Nothing that morning seemed of the least importance save a curious necessity to be still and inquire of himself what had happened.

He thought only of Miranda, wondering why he saw her now at a distance.

A company of roughs lay between Peter and his friends. He was cut off; but it did not seem to matter. Everything that morning was unreal. He walked quite indifferently towards them. They seemed so remote that, had they vanished into air, he would not have been surprised.

Peter pushed loftily past a handsome young rough.

"Now then," said the fellow.

"Let me pass," said Peter, curiously pedantic beside the other.

"Not so fast."

"Let go of my arm," said Peter.

"Not much," said the enemy.

Peter flew into a rage.

"Funk," he said, without point or reason.

"Say it again."

"Funk."

"Who's a funk?"

"You are."

"Are you calling me a funk?"

"Yes."

"Say it again."

"Funk."

There was a deadlock. Peter must try something else.

"See this face?" he inquired with deadly offensiveness, thrusting forward his countenance for exhibition.

"Take it away," said the other.

"Hit it," said Peter.

"I shall if you don't take it away."

"Just you hit it."

Peter's enemy did hit it. Immediately a ring was formed. Peter fell back into his mood of indifference to the world. This fight was a nuisance, but it had to go on.

They fought three vigorous rounds. From every court and alley spectators poured. Windows were flung up.

Then a policeman was seen, and in ten seconds the street was empty again. Peter jogged off to the main road. The roughs scattered into holes.

Peter, late for school, came up for inspection with a swollen lip and an eye which became more remarkable as time went on. But pain this morning meant as little to Peter as reproof. He was unable to take things seriously. He felt curiously above them.

Home at midday he avoided his family. He felt a necessity to be alone, to dream and to exult over something that had neither shape nor name. He went into a secret passage.

This secret passage was intimately bound up with his life of adventure. The gardens of Peter's road met at the bottom the gardens of a parallel highway. The two rows were parted by a line of trees and a wall. On the farther side of the wall a thick hedge, planted a few feet from the foot of the wall, had been trained to meet it

overhead. After many years it formed a natural green tunnel between the gardens. This tunnel, cleared of dead shoots and leaves, was large enough for Peter and Miranda to crawl from end to end of the wall's foot, and gave them access, after pioneering, to the trees which rose regularly from the midst of the hedge.

Peter to-day climbed into the secret passage, not for adventure but to be alone. The old life seemed very remote. Could he really have believed that the tree against which he leaned was a fortress that had cost him ten thousand men?

A humble bee bustled into the shade and fell, overloaded with pollen. Peter watched it closely. Already he found himself seeing little things — their beauty and a vague impulse in himself to express it.

Peter's indifference to the impertinent call of the things of yesterday was quite wonderful.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Paragon at dinner, "you've been fighting."

"Yes, father," said Peter.

"Goodness gracious!" Mrs. Paragon exclaimed. "Look at Peter's face!"

"Yes, mother," said Peter.

"Tell us about it, my boy," twinkled Mr. Paragon.

"There's nothing to tell, father."

"Was he a big boy?" Mr. Paragon asked.

"Middling."

"Did you beat him?"

"No, father."

"Did he beat you?"

"No, father."

Mr. Paragon looked at Peter with misgiving.

"Mary," said Mr. Paragon in the late evening,  
"Peter's growing up."

They were sitting together in the garden, Mr. Paragon smoking a pipe after supper. It was warm and quiet, with occasional light noises from the wood and the near houses. It was Mr. Paragon's moment of peace — a time for minor meditations, softened by the stars and the flowers, equally his by right of conquest.

Mrs. Paragon sighed. She divined a coming rift between herself and Peter.

"He is very young," she protested.

"He was always older than his years," said Mr. Paragon; and, after a silence, he added: "Don't lose touch with the boy, Mary. We have got to help him over these discoveries. Life's too fine to be picked up anyhow."

"It's not easy to keep with the young. There's so much to understand."

Mrs. Paragon said this a little sadly, and Mr. Paragon felt bound to comfort her.

"Peter's a good boy," he said.

Meantime Peter in his attic was not asleep. It was his habit, shut in his room for the night, to climb through the skylight, and sit upon a flat and cozy space of the roof by the warm chimney.

There he was frequently joined by Miranda from the attic of the next house.

But Peter sat this evening at the window. The garden was quick with faint play of the wind; and Peter's ears were sensitive to small noises of the trees.

There was a faint tapping upon the wall. Peter was instantly alert, and as instantly amazed at the effect upon himself of this familiar signal. He had heard it a hundred times. It was thus that he and Miranda communicated with one another when they went up to their nook by the chimney.

He looked into the dark room. The signal was repeated, but he sat by the window like alabaster, his heart beating in his ears.

The knocking ceased, and for a long while Peter sat still as a stone. Then he sprang at the cord of the skylight window, opened it and crept out. Miranda was perched between the chimneys. It was quite dark. Peter could only see that she was staring away from him.

"Miranda!" His voice trembled and broke, but she did not move.

He knew now he had not been dreaming. Miranda, too, was changed. He felt it in the poise of her averted face and in her silence.

He waited to say he knew not what, and stayed there, a queer figure sitting astride the slates. Miranda's arm lay along the skylight. He touched her.



She caught her breath, and Peter knew she was crying.

"Miranda," he called, "why are you crying?"

She turned in the dark and a tear splashed on his hand.

"I'm not crying!" she flashed. "I thought you were never coming," she added inconsequently.

It was Peter's first encounter with a woman. He was for a moment checked.

"Miranda!" he said; and again his voice trembled and broke on the name. Miranda, in a single day as old as a thousand years, vibrated to the word half-uttered. She dropped her head into her hands, and wept aloud.

Peter held her tight, speaking now at random.

"I always meant to come," he quavered. "You know I always meant to come. Miranda, don't cry so. I was afraid when first I heard you knocking."

"You'll always love me, Peter."

"For ever and ever."

Every little sound was exaggerated. There was a low mutter of voices in the garden below. Peter saw the glow of his father's pipe. So near it seemed, he fancied he could smell the tobacco.

Mr. and Mrs. Paragon, talking of Peter, sat later than usual. Before going to bed, they went into the attic, and stood together for a while. Peter had fallen happily asleep. Miranda was comforted, and he was lifted above all the heroes.

The shadow of adolescence lay upon him. His mother saw it, and, as she kissed him, it seemed as if she were bidding him farewell upon a great adventure.

## V

PETER in common daylight carefully examined his face in the looking-glass. His left eye was a painter's palette. He ruefully remembered that the fight had yet to be finished. He was bound to offer his adversary an opportunity of completing the good work, and he distinctly quailed. Peter was this morning upon solid earth. The crisis was past. He knew now that he had quickly to be a man, to get knowledge and wealth and power.

Boys at Peter's branch of the foundation of King Edward VI could no higher ascend into knowledge than the binomial theorem. Peter, not yet fifteen, was already head of the school — the favourite pupil of his masters, easily leading in learning and cricket. Already it was a question whether he should or should not proceed to the High School where Greek and the Calculus were to be had.

Peter's career was already a problem. Mr. Paragon inclined to believe that the best thing for a boy of fifteen was to turn into business, leaving Greek to the parsons. Mrs. Paragon had different views. Peter was yet unaware of this discussion, nor had he wondered what would happen when the time came for leaving his first school.

Peter's company raised a chorus when they be-

held him. They explained to Peter what his face was like. They were proud of it. A terrible and bloody fellow was their captain.

When Peter met his adversary each noted with pleasure that the other was honourably marked.

The handsome rough thrust out a large red hand.

“Take it or leave it,” he said.

Peter took it. The bells were calling in a final burst, and he passed rapidly on with his company. It was peace with honour.

Peter was in a resolute grapple with the binomial theorem when a call came for him to go into the headmaster's room. Peter, delicately feeling his battered face, followed the school-porter with misgiving.

“Paragon,” said the headmaster, “I don't like your face. It isn't respectable.”

Peter writhed softly, aware that he was ironically contemplated.

“This fighting in the streets,” continued the headmaster, “is becoming a public nuisance. I should be sorry to believe that any of our boys provoked it. I hope it was self-defence.”

“Mostly, sir,” said Peter.

“I rely upon you, Paragon, to avoid making the school a nuisance to the parish.”

“I realise my responsibility, sir.”

Peter was quite serious, and the headmaster did not smile.

“Now, Paragon,” he said, “I want to talk to

you about something else. I have just written to your father. Do you know what you would like to do when you leave school?"

"No, sir," said Peter.

Peter had, in fancy, invented posts for himself that would tax to the fullest extent his complicated genius. He had lived a hundred lives. Nevertheless, bluntly asked whether he had thought about his future, he as bluntly answered "No," and knew in a moment that the answer was dreadfully true. His cloud cuckooland of battle and success, magnificent with pictures of himself in all the great attitudes of history, vanished at a simple question. He was rapidly growing old.

The headmaster continued, pitilessly sensible.

"I want you to go on with your education," he said. "You have done very well with us here. I have written to your father urging him to send you to the High School where it will be possible for you to qualify for the University. I want you, before you see your father, to make up your mind what you want to do."

Peter left the headmaster's room with a sense of loss. The glamour had gone out of life. His future, vast and uncertain, had in a moment narrowed to a practical issue. Should he go on to another school, or into some office of the town? These were dreary alternatives. Already he was fifteen years old, and he had somehow to be the most famous man in the world within the next five years.

Peter's father went that day to visit his brother-in-law.

Henry Prout, Peter's uncle and godfather, had at this time retired from the retailing of hardware. He was wealthy, an alderman of the town, and a bachelor. He took a father's interest in his nephew. There was a tacit, very indefinite assumption that in all which nearly concerned his sister's son Henry had a right to be consulted.

When Peter heard his father had gone round to his uncle's house he knew his career was that evening to be decided.

Henry Prout was a copy in gross of his sister. Mrs. Paragon was queenly and fair. Henry was large and florid. Mrs. Paragon was amiable and full of peace. Henry was genial and lazy. Mrs. Paragon equably accepted life from a naturally perfect balance of character, Henry from a naturally perfect confidence in the inclinations of his rosy and abundant flesh.

Uncle Henry had one large regret. He had had no education, and he greatly envied the people who had. His admiration for the results of education was really a part of his indolence. He admired the readiness and ease with which educated people disposed of problems which cost him painful efforts of the brain. Education was for Uncle Henry a royal way to the settlement of every difficult thing. If you had education, life was an arm-chair. If you had it not, life was a

necessity to think things laboriously out for yourself.

Uncle Henry had made up his mind that Peter should have the best education money could buy. Peter, he determined, should learn Greek.

"Well, George," he said in his comfortable thick voice, "what's it going to be?"

He was not yet alluding to Peter's career, but to some bottles on the little table between them.

"Half and half," said George.

"Help yourself," said Henry, adding, as Mr. Paragon portioned out his whisky, "How's sister?"

"Up to the mark every time."

"She's all right. There's not a more healthy woman in England than sister."

Henry paused a little in reflection upon the virtues of Mrs. Paragon. He then continued.

"How's the boy?"

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. Paragon, "he's growing up."

"Fifteen next December."

"Old for his age," said Mr. Paragon, nodding between the lines.

Uncle Henry thoughtfully compressed his lips.

"Well," he said, "I suppose the boy will have to find out what he's made of."

"He's very thick next door," suggested Mr. Paragon with a meaning eye.

"I've noticed her, George. She'll soon be finding out a thing or two for herself."

"There's a handsome woman there," said Mr. Paragon.

"Well enough."

They paused again in contemplation of possibilities in Miranda.

"I've had a letter," said Mr. Paragon at last. The headmaster's sheet was handed over, and carefully deciphered.

"Writes a shocking hand," said Uncle Henry. "That's education. Peter's hand," he added contentedly, "is worse. I can't make head or tail of what Peter writes."

Henry mixed himself another whisky. "They seem to think a great lot of him," he said thoughtfully. "That about the Scholarships, for instance. They say he'll get the £30. Then he goes to the High School and gets £50, and £80 at the University. Think of that, George."

"I don't hold with it," Mr. Paragon broke out.

"Education," Henry began.

"Education yourself," interrupted Mr. Paragon. "What's the good of all that second-hand stuff?"

"It helps."

"Yes. It helps to make a nob of my son. It's little he'll learn at the University except to take off his hat to people no better than himself."

"Can't you trust him?"

"Peter's all right," Mr. Paragon jealously admitted.

"There's no harm in a bit of Greek. You talk



as if it was going to turn him straight off into a bishop."

Uncle Henry paused, and, desiring to make a point, took the hearthrug.

"I can't understand you," he continued, with legs well apart. "If Peter is going to have my money, he's got to learn how to spend it. Look at myself. I have had sense to make a bit of money, but I've got no more idea of spending it than a baby. I want Peter to learn."

"That's all right," said Mr. Paragon. "But what's going to happen to Peter when he gets into the hands of a lot of doctors?"

"Peter must take his chance."

"It's well for you to talk. You're as blue as they're made, and a churchwarden of the parish."

Uncle Henry solemnly put down his glass. "George," he said, "it does not matter to a mortal fool what I am, nor what you are. Peter's got to find things out for himself. He'll get past you and me; and, whether he comes out your side or mine, he'll have more in his head."

Uncle Henry ended with an air of having closed the discussion, and, after some friendly meditation, whose results were flung out in the fashion of men too used to each other's habit of thought to need elaborate intercourse, Mr. Paragon rose and went thoughtfully home.

By the time he reached the Kidderminster Road he had definitely settled the question of Peter's career. Peter should get knowledge. He should

possess the inner fortress of learning. He should be the perfect knight of the oppressed people, armed at all points. Thus did Mr. Paragon reconcile his Radical prejudices with his fatherly ambition.

Arrived home, he showed the headmaster's letter to Mrs. Paragon.

She read it with the pride of a mother who knows the worth of her boy, but nevertheless likes it to be acknowledged.

Mr. Paragon watched her as she read.

"Yes," he said, answering her thoughts, "Peter's all right."

Mrs. Paragon handed back the letter.

"I suppose," suggested Mr. Paragon, airily magnificent, "he had better go on with his education?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Paragon.

Mr. Paragon knew at once that if he had persisted in taking Peter from school he would have had to persuade his wife that it was right to do so. He also knew that this would have been very difficult.

Fortunately, however, he had decided otherwise. He could flatter himself now that he had settled this grave question himself. It was true, in a sense, that he had. Mr. Paragon had not for nothing lived with his wife for nearly seventeen years.

## VI

PETER was not happy at the High School. It is disconcerting, when you have been First Boy and a Captain, to be put among inferior creatures to learn Greek. Peter had risen with his former friends from the lowest to the highest; they had grown together in sport and learning. Now he found himself in a middle form, an interloper among cliques already established. Moreover, the boys at the High School, where education for such as could not obtain a foundation scholarship was more expensive than at the lower branches, were of a superior quality, with nicer manners and a more delicate way of speaking. He was a stranger.

At sixteen Peter was almost a man. His father had always met him upon an intellectual equality. They had talked upon the gravest matters. Peter had voraciously read a thousand books which he did not altogether understand. It needed only physical adolescence to show him how far he had outstripped the friends of his age.

The lot of a precocious boy is not a happy one, and Peter paid the penalty. He made not a single friend during his two years at the new school. He lived gravely after his own devices, quiet, observant, superficially accessible to the kind ad-

vances of his masters and classfellows, but profoundly unaffected.

Nevertheless these years were the most important of Peter's life, wherein he learned all that his father was able to teach him. Peter, years after he had outlived much of his early wisdom, yet looked back upon this time as peculiarly sacred to his father. From him he learned to accept naturally the perplexing instincts that now were arisen within him. Peter escaped the usual unhappy period of surmise and shamefast perplexity.

More particularly these were the glorious years of Peter and Miranda. Peter found in Miranda the perfect maid, and Miranda, eager for knowledge and greedy of adoration, reaching after the life of a woman with the mind and body of a girl, found in Peter the pivot of the world. In these years were laid the foundations of an incredible intimacy. Daily they grew in a perpetual discovery of themselves. Peter opened to Miranda the store of his knowledge. There was perfect confidence. At an age when the secrets of life are the subject of uneasy curiosity at best, and at worst of thoughtless defamation, Peter and Miranda talked of them as they talked of their bees (Peter's latest craze); of the stars; of the poets they loved (Miranda was not yet altogether a woman: she loved the poets); of the life they would lead in the friendly world.

Miranda was the more thrown upon Peter as

neither of her parents was able to direct her. Her mother was entirely unimaginative. Her fierce affection for Miranda showed itself in a continual insistence that she should "behave"; read and eat only what was good for her; and be as well, if not better, dressed than the children of her neighbours. For her father Miranda had some affection, but she could not respect him. She saw him continually overridden by her mother, and already she overtopped him in stature by a head.

The months went quickly by, and soon it was the eve of Peter's journey to Oxford as the candidate for an open scholarship. Peter was nervously excited. Every little detail, in his heightened sensibility, seemed important. It was late summer, a warm night, the room filling rapidly with shadows. Miranda sat by the window, her face to the fallen sun.

The men were talking politics. Their lifted voices grated upon Peter's thoughts. It was a time of strikes and rioting. Mr. Paragon, as an orator, was urgently requested in the streets of Hamingburgh. He was full of his theme, and extremely angry with Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was an entirely amiable little man, but he delighted in the phrases of battle. He talked politics in a soldier's terms. He was perpetually storming the enemy's position or turning his rear. The English political situation was in Mr. Smith's view never far removed from war and revolution. He delighted in images of violence. The mildest of

small men, whose nerves were shattered by an unexpected noise, he was always ready to talk of the prime duty of governments to stamp out rebellion in blood. Mr. Smith could not pull a cracker at Christmas without shutting his eyes and getting as far as possible from the explosion; but, politically, he was a Prussian.

“Shoot them down!”

Mr. Smith was repeating a formula by now almost mechanical.

To Peter it was desperately familiar. The men's voices every now and then were overborne by Mrs. Smith in one of her perpetual recommendations to Miranda.

“Take your elbows off the sill, Miranda.”

“Yes, mother.”

Miranda answered with the mechanical obedience of a child who makes allowances.

She turned at the same time into the room, full of the contrast between the beauty of the garden and the two absurd figures in dispute upon the hearthrug. She looked over to Peter in the shadow.

His eyes were full of her, burning with delight.

Miranda, meeting his look, felt suddenly too glad for endurance. She burst from her seat.

Her mother's voice, thin and penetrating, was plainly heard above the ground-bass of political argument.

“Where are you going, Miranda?”

“Into the garden, mother,” patiently answered

Miranda, and with never a look at Peter she went.

The men talked on. Peter quietly followed Miranda into the garden, unnoticed except by his mother.

Mrs. Paragon had read the lines of her son's face. She sighed as he slipped away, knowing that at that moment the world held for Peter but one thing really precious. She smiled, not bitterly, but with indulgence, upon the talking fathers.

Peter and Miranda sat for many minutes without a word. The evening was perfect, the shining of stars in a violet sky mocked on earth with the shining of great clusters of evening primrose. How full the night seemed! The stars were very secret, but the secret waited to be told.

"I shall not be able to bear it," said Miranda suddenly.

"Four days," said Peter.

"But after that."

"Eight weeks at a time."

But Miranda's heart sank at the eternity of eight weeks.

Protesting with her, Peter at last said:

"I'm always with you, Miranda."

She turned and found he was looking where Mirza glittered with its companion star. He had written her a poem in which he had likened Mirza to himself, eternally passing through heaven with his tiny friend.

Miranda felt to-night how empty was this fancy.

“You are going away,” she said, “and you have never ——” She stopped, frightened and ashamed. She wished to run from the place, and she was glad of the dark.

The feeling passed, and she lifted her head, looking at Peter. Her eyes were full of challenge and of fear, of confession, of reserve — the courage of a maid — proud to be as yet untouched, but happy in surrender.

“All that I have — and how beautiful it is! — is yours,” was what Peter read.

The tears rushed into her eyes. They both were crying as Peter kissed her. It was the first kiss of lovers two years old, the first delicate breach of their chastity.

Miranda lifted her head upon Peter’s arm.

“I want to be with you always,” she said. “I cannot bear you to go away.”

Footsteps intruded. Uncle Henry had come, God-speeding his nephew. Peter had been missed, and Uncle Henry was coming to find him. Peter felt as if the world were advancing to rob him of something too precious to be lawfully his. He wanted to save Miranda from this intrusion.

“Good-bye, darling!” he whispered.

She understood.

“Hold me near to you, Peter,” she said. They kissed a second time, lingering on the peril of discovery. She ran lightly away as Uncle Henry parted the bushes and thrust his great head towards the seat.



"Hullo, Peter, my boy, is that you?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"I thought I would look round to wish you luck."

"Thank you, Uncle."

"Somebody did not want to see me," said Uncle Henry, crossly following Miranda with his eyes.

Peter flashed an indignant look upon his uncle. He could not tell him why Miranda had gone away; how she was too precious to suffer the contact of dull earth.

They walked into the house. For Peter the rest of the evening passed in a dream. He made his plans for an early breakfast, received the last advice as to his trains and the disposition of his money, and went as soon as possible to his bedroom under the eaves.

## VII

MIRANDA was at the window as Peter drove off next morning in a hansom-cab. The sun was shining, the earth green after rain. Peter was starting on his first unaccompanied journey in his first hansom-cab, and he was unable to feel as miserable as he should. Miranda gave him a smile that struggled to be free of sadness at losing him for four days, and of envy at his adventure. Peter knew how she felt, and he was angry with himself for being happy.

The miles flew quickly by. Peter soon began to wonder in pleasant excitement what Oxford was like.

At Oxford station he was immediately sensible of the advantages of a town where a great many people live only to anticipate the wishes of young gentlemen. In Hamingburgh only people with great presence of mind can succeed in being attended to by the men who in that independent city put themselves, as cabmen, porters, and shop assistants, into positions of superiority to the public. Peter was amazed at the deference with which his arrival upon the platform was met. The whole town seemed only anxious that he should reach his lodgings as quickly and as comfortably as possible.

Peter's impressions thereafter were fierce and

rapid. His four days were a wonderful round of visits. He perused the colleges, the gardens, and the river. He called upon old schoolfellows for whom the life of Oxford was already commonplace; who had long since forgotten that they were living in one of the loveliest of mediæval towns; who blindly perambulated the cloisters, weighing the issues of a Test Match. He visited professors by invitation, and listened for the first time in his life to after-dinner conversation incredibly polite. After his papers were written for the day, he could make a quiet meal and issue adventurously into the streets, eagerly looking into the career at whose threshold he had arrived.

Peter was in a city of illusion. He constructed the life, whose outward activities he so curiously followed, from the stones of Oxford, and saw, as it seemed to him, an existence surrendered to lovely influences of culture and the awful discipline of knowledge. With reverence he encountered in the quadrangle of the college whose hospitality he was seeking, a majestic figure, silver-haired, of dreaming aspect, passing gravely to his pulpit of learning. This was that famous Warden, renowned in Europe as the author of many books wherein the mightiest found themselves corrected.

Later in the day he enviously saw the inhabitants of this happy world, who in the morning had followed the Warden in to his lecture to get wisdom, issue from their rooms (whose windows

opened within rustle of the trees and prospect of a venerable lawn) dressed for the field or river. It particularly impressed Peter that in this attire they should take their way unconcerned through the streets of the town. No one would have dared, in Hamingburgh, to be thus conspicuous. How debonair and free was life in this heavenly city!

At evening Peter walked in the streets and quadrangles, getting precious glimpses of an interior studiously lit, with groups, as he fancied them, of sober scholars in grave debate upon their studies of the morning; or, perhaps, in pleasant reminiscence of their games of the afternoon. Sometimes Peter would hear a burst of laughter or see through the panes of a college window a group of men deep in poker or bridge. Peter then remembered wild tales of the license of young bloods, and was not displeased. It added a zest to his meditations.

Peter's last evening focussed his impressions. It was the agreeable habit of the dons of Gamaliel College to invite their candidates to dinner when the trial was over. Peter accepted the invitation with dismay. It was the first time he had ever proposed to take an evening meal by way of dinner; he was afraid.

Nevertheless, the reality was quite pleasant. His first impression of the dons of Gamaliel was of their kindly interest in himself. He seemed to be specially selected for attention. The Warden in his welcome looked perusingly at him. Peter's

instinct, quick to feel an atmosphere, warned him, as they talked, that he was being tactfully drawn. He noticed also the smiles that occasionally passed when he plunged into some vigorous opinion about the books he hated or loved. Insensibly he grew more cautious, and, as the dinner advanced, he was amazed to hear himself, as though he were listening to someone else, saying things in a new way. Peter was beginning to acquire the Oxford manner. His old life was receding. He caught vaguely at a memory of Miranda, but she lived in another world. Here he sat a king of the earth. A beautifully spoken, white-haired servant at his elbow filled his glass with golden wine, and as he accepted regally of delicate meats from dishes respectfully offered, he heard himself, in tones already grown strangely in tune with those of his companions, contributing discreet opinions.

Peter, too, was drinking. He discovered how easy it was to talk at ease, to sparkle, to throw out, in grand disorder, the thronging visions of his brain. Far from shrinking in diffidence from the necessity to assert himself and to be prominent, he began now actively to intervene.

Peter never remembered how first they came to talk of bees. But he did not for years forget the dramatic circumstances of this conversation. He never lost the horror with which he realised immediately after the event that he had contradicted the Reverend Warden, and that the whole table was waiting for him to make his contention good.

“ Well, Mr. Paragon, how do you explain all this? ”

The room had suddenly become silent. All the little conversations had gone out. For the first time Peter felt that an audience was hanging upon him. He flushed, set his teeth, and talked. He talked with enthusiasm, tempered instinctively with the Oxford manner. His enthusiasm delighted the dons of Gamaliel, to whom it was very strange, and his experience interested them. Peter loved his bees and handled them well. When he had ended his account, all kinds of questions were asked. More than ever he felt elated and sure of himself. He emptied yet another glass of the golden wine.

“ I'm becoming quite brilliant, ” he thought.

Then he saw that the Warden was speaking into an ear of the white-haired servant, glancing with ever so slight a gesture at Peter's empty glass. This time the servant in passing round the table omitted Peter.

Peter was quick to understand. He arrested himself in the act of saying something foolish. Clearly the wine had gone into his head. He wondered whether he would be able to stand up when the time came. He sank suddenly into himself, answering when he was appealed to directly, but otherwise content to watch the table. He thought with remorse of Miranda, almost forgotten amid the excitement of these last days. He saw again the garden as it looked on the evening

of his farewell. He wanted to be away from these strange people, from the raftered hall, the table soft-lit, beautiful with silver and glass. The voices went far-off. Only when his neighbour touched him on the shoulder did he notice that his companions were moving.

The Warden bade him a cordial good-bye. He smiled at Peter in a way that made his heart leap with a conviction that he had been successful.

"I wonder," Peter said to himself as he walked back to his rooms—"I wonder if I am really drunk?" He had never felt before quite as he did to-night. Now that he was in the open, he wanted to leap and to sing.

The municipal band was playing as he turned into the street. Round it were gathered in promenade an idle crowd of young shopkeepers, coupled, or desirous of being coupled, with girls of the town.

Peter noticed a handsome young woman at the edge of the crowd, hanging upon the arm of a young man. She was closely observing him as he came up. It seemed to Peter that she mischievously challenged him. Her companion was staring vacantly at the bandsmen. Peter paused irresolutely, flushed a burning red, and passed hastily away.

He was astonished and humiliated at his physical commotion. The music sounded hatefully the three-four rhythm of surrender. He was yet able to hear it as he stood under the window of his

room. He saw again the enigmatic eyes of the girl, the faint welcome of her smile, so slight as to be no more than a shadow, the coquettish recoil of her shoulders as he paused.

He turned into his lodgings, and ten o'clock began to strike on the Oxford bells. He waited for several minutes till the last had sounded. Oxford, for Peter, was to the end a city of bells. He never lost the impression of his first night as he lay, too excited for sleep, his thoughts interrupted with the hours as they sounded, high and low, till the last straggler had ended. It always profoundly affected him, this converse at night between turret and turret of the sleeping stones. It came at last to emphasize his impression of Oxford as a place whose actual and permanent life was in the walls and trees, whose men were shadows.

To-night the bells invited Peter to look into the greater life he expected to lead in this place. The scattered glimpses of a beautiful world at whose threshold he stood were now united in a hope that soon he would permanently share it within call of the hours as melodiously in this grey city they passed.

The fumes of the evening were blown away; the band in the street was no longer heard. Peter, awake in bed, heard yet another striking of the hour. He was looking back to his last evening with Miranda. How did she come into this new life? He thought of her sleeping, parted by a



wall's breadth from his empty room at home, and was invaded with a desire to be near her greater than his envy of anything that sounded in the striking bells.

“Miranda.” He repeated the syllables to himself as the bells were striking, and fell asleep upon her name.

## VIII

PETER, home after his first important absence, found that his former life had shrunk. He had seen things on a generous scale. Only for four days had he been away, but it was an epoch.

He went immediately to find Miranda, trembling with impatience. But he was struck shy when they met. Peter had imagined this meeting as a perfect renewal of their last moments together. He had seen himself thrilling into a passionate welcome, taking up his life with Miranda where it had abruptly ceased with the arrival of Uncle Henry four days ago. But at sight of her the current of his eagerness was checked. It was that curious moment of lovers who have lived through so many meetings in imagination that the actual moment cannot be fulfilled.

"You're back," she said awkwardly, hardly able to look at him.

"I've just this moment come." Peter thought it was the staring daylight that put this constraint upon them. Then he saw in his fancy the welcome he had expected — very different from this — and, as though he were acting something many times rehearsed, he kissed Miranda with an intended joy.

Miranda's constraint was now broken.

"I have missed you dreadfully," she whispered.

She held him tight, urged by the piteous memory of four empty days; and Peter, rising at her passion, strained her truthfully towards him. The disillusion of meeting fell away from them both.

Soon he was talking to her of Oxford, and the great life he had shared. He did not realise that a strain of arrogant enthusiasm came into his tale — a suggestion that in these last four days he had flapped the wings of his ambition in high air and dazzling sunshine. Miranda was chilled, feeling she had been in the cold, divining that Peter had a little grown away from her in the things he recounted with such unnecessary joy. At last she interrupted him.

"You haven't missed me, Peter."

"But I have," answered Peter, passing in a breath to tell of his encounter with the dons of Gamaliel. Miranda put her hand into his, but Peter, graphically intent upon his tale, insensibly removed it for a necessary gesture.

"I don't want to hear," said Miranda suddenly.

She slipped from where they sat, and, killing him with her eyes, walked abruptly away.

Peter was struck into dismay. Remorse for his selfish intentness upon glories Miranda had not shared shot him through. But he stayed where she had left him, sullenly resentful. She need not have been so violent: How ugly was her voice when she told him she did not want to hear.

Peter noticed in her swinging dress a patched rent, and her dusty shoes down at the heel. Spitefully he called into his mind, for contrast and to support him in his resentment, the quiet and ordered beauty of the life he had just seen. He retired with dignity to the house, and made miserable efforts to forget that Miranda was estranged.

Mrs. Paragon wanted to hear all that Peter had seen and done. Peter told again his tale without enthusiasm. Then his father also must hear. Peter talked of Oxford, wondering, as he talked, where Miranda had gone, and whether she would forgive him even if he admitted he was to blame. His experiences now had lost all their charm. He had taken a vain pleasure in glorifying them to Miranda, but the glory now was spoiled.

Mr. Paragon was delighted to hear Peter describing his first serious introduction to polite company without seeming violently pleased. Clearly Oxford was not going to corrupt him. Peter spoke almost with distaste of his fine friends.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Paragon, "you don't seem to think much of this high living."

"It's all right, father," answered Peter, absently dwelling on Miranda.

"What did you talk about? Mostly trash, I suppose?"

"Yes, father." Peter was now at Miranda's feet, asking her to forgive him.

A little later Mr. Smith came in, and the time passed heavily away. Mr. Smith was trying to

dissuade Mr. Paragon from taking part in an angry demonstration of railway men who had struck work in the previous week. Already there had been rioting. To-night Mr. Paragon was to address a meeting in the open air, and his talk was loud and bitter. Peter heard all this rhetoric with faint disgust. He was at that time in all things his father's disciple. But to-night his brain was dancing between a proud girl, with eyes that hurt, swinging away from him in her patched frock and dusty shoes, and a long, low-lit table elegant with silver and glass. He could not listen to these foolish men; and when Mr. Smith had reached the summit of his theme in a call to "shoot them down," and when his father was clearly making ready utterly to destroy his enemy, Peter went impatiently from the room.

Mrs. Paragon made ready her husband for the meeting without regarding Mr. Smith's gloomy fears of disorder and riot. It had always been Mr. Paragon's amusement to speak in public, and she had decided that politics could have no serious results. For a few minutes she watched him diminish up the long street, and then returned to the kitchen where Mr. Smith, balancing on his toes, talked still of the dark necessities of blood and iron.

Two hours later Peter's father was brought home dead, with a bullet in his brain.

## IX

PETER sat stonily where Miranda left him earlier in the day. It was now quite dark, the evening primrose shining in tall clusters, very pale, within reach of his hand. Since a cab had jingled into hearing, stopped beside the house, and jingled away, hardly a sound had broken into his thoughts. Each rustle of the trees or lightest noise of the garden raised in him a riot of excitement; for he felt that Miranda would come, and he lived moment by moment intensely waiting. He was sure she would not be able to sleep without making her peace.

Several times he moaned softly, and asked for her aloud. Once he was filled with bitterest anger, and started to go back into the house. He hated her. His brilliant future should not be linked with this rude and shabby girl. Then, in sharp remorse, he asked to be forgiven. Tears of self-pity had followed tears of anger and tears of utter pain, and had dried on his cheeks as he rigidly kept one posture on the narrow bench. He felt to-night that he had the power to experience and to utter all the sorrow of the world, and mixed with his pain there were sensations of the keenest luxury.

At last a footstep sounded. He began to trem-

ble unendurably; but in the next instant he knew it was not Miranda. He had not recovered from his disappointment when his mother stood beside him.

He looked at her vaguely, not yet recalled from his raging thoughts. She called his name, and there was something in her voice that startled him. The moon which was now coming over the house poured its light upon her face. Swiftly Peter was aware of some terrible thing struggling for expression. His mother's eyes were clouded as though she was dazed from the effect of some hard and sudden blow. Her lips were drawn tight as though she suffered. She stood for a moment, and once or twice just failed to speak.

"Peter," she said at last, "I have to tell you something."

Peter stared at her, quickly beginning to fear.

"Don't be frightened, dear boy." Peter saw the first tears gather and fall.

"Mother, you are hurt."

Her tears now fell rapidly as she stooped and strained Peter towards her. She could not bear to see his face as she told him.

"Something terrible has happened. There has been a fight in the streets and father ——"

Her arms tightened about him. Peter knew his father was dead.

"We are alone, Peter," she said at last.

Then she rose, and there were no more tears.

Erect in the moonlight, she seemed the statue of a mourning woman.

"He is lying in our room, Peter. Won't you come?"

Peter instinctively shuddered away. Then, feeling as though a weight had just been laid on him, he asked:

"Can I help you, mother? Is there anything to do?"

"Uncle Henry is here. Come when you can."

Peter watched her move away towards the house. Self died outright in him as, filled with worship, he saw her, grave and beautiful, going to the dead man.

Soon he wondered why, now that trouble had really come, he could not so easily be moved. The tears, which so readily had started from his eyes as he had brooded on his quarrel with Miranda, would not flow now for his father. His imagination could not at once accept reality. He sat as his mother had left him, sensible of a gradual ache that stole into his brain. Time passed; and, at last, as the ache became intolerable, he heard himself desperately repeating to himself the syllables:

"Never, Never."

He would never again see his father. Then his brain at last awoke in a vision of his father, an hour ago or so, confronting Mr. Smith. Peter's emotion first sprang alive in a sharp remorse. He had that evening found his father insufferable.



Peter could no longer sit. He walked rapidly up and down the garden, giving rein to self-torment. He had always thought of his father, and now remembered him most vividly, as one who had read with him the books which first had opened his mind. His father shone now upon Peter crowned with all the hard, bright literature of revolt.

A harsh cry suddenly broke up the silence of the garden. A newsboy ran shrieking a special edition, with headlines of riot and someone killed.

The cry struck Peter motionless. He had realised so far that his father was dead. Now he remembered the riot. The newsboy had shouted of a charge of soldiers.

Why had Peter not accepted his father's gospel? Why had he not stood that evening by his father's side? The enemies of whom his father had so often talked to Peter were real, and had struck him down. All the idle rhetoric that had slept unregarded in Peter's brain now rang like a challenge of trumpets. He saw his father as one who had tried to teach him a brave gospel of freedom, who had resisted tyranny, and died for his faith.

Peter cursed the oppressor with clenched hands. In the tumble of his thoughts there intruded pictures, quite unconnected, of the life he had known at his first school — encounters with the friendly roughs, their common hatred of the police, the comfortable, oily embrace of the woman who had picked him from the snow. He felt now that he

was one of these struggling people, that he ought that night to have stood with his father. In contrast with the warm years in which he had gloried in the life of his humbler school his later comparative solitude coldly emphasized his kinship with the dispossessed.

Scarcely twenty-four hours ago Peter had feasted with the luxurious enemies of the poor. He had come from them, vainglorious and eager to claim their fellowship. For this he had been terribly punished. Peter felt the hand of God in all this. It seemed like destiny's reward for disloyalty to all his father had taught.

He went into the house, and soon was looking at the dead man. His mother moved about the room, obeying her instinct to put all into keeping with the cold severity of that still figure. Peter looked and went rapidly away. He felt no tie of blood or affection. He was looking at death — at something immensely distant.

Nevertheless, as he went from the oppressive house, this chill vision of death consecrated in his fancy the figure, legendary now, of a martyred prophet of revolt. By comparison he hardly felt his personal loss of a father.

As he passed into the garden, he saw into the brilliantly lighted room next door. Mr. Smith sprawled with his head on the table, sobbing like a child. Peter, in a flash, remembered him as he had stood not two hours ago beside his father, shrilly repeating an hortation to shoot them down.

In that moment Peter had his first glimpse of the irony of life. He felt impulsively that he ought to comfort that foolish bowed figure whose babble had been so rudely answered.

Then, as Mr. Smith was seen to wipe his watery eyes with a spotted handkerchief, Peter grew impatient under that sting of absurdity which in life pricks the holiest sorrow. He turned sharply away, and in the path he saw Miranda.

She put out her arm with a blind gesture to check the momentum of his recoil from the lighted window. He caught at her hand, but his fingers closed upon the rough serge of her sleeve. His passion leaped instantly to a climax. It was one of those rare moments when feeling must find pictured expression; when every barrier is down between emotion and its gesture. Miranda stood before him, the reproach of his disloyalty, a perfect figure of the life he must embrace. His hand upon her dress shot instantly into his brain a memory of that mean moment when he had nursed his wrongs upon her homeliness. A fierce contrition flung him without pose or premeditation on his knees beside her. As she leaned in wonder towards him, he caught the fringe of her frayed skirt in his hands, and, in a moment of supreme dedication, kissed it in a passion of worship.

## X

THE interim between the death of Peter's father and Peter's ascent into Oxford was filled with small events which impertinently buzzed about him. Even his father's funeral left no deep impression. It was formal and necessary. Peter was haunted, as the ceremony dragged on, with a reproachful sense that he was not, as he should, responding to its solemnity. Passion, of love or grief or adoration, came to Peter by inspiration. He could not punctually answer. He marvelled how easily at the graveside the tears of his friends and neighbours were able to flow. He himself had buried his father upon the night of his father's death, and had started life anew. The funeral was for him no more than the ghost of a dead event.

Next came the removal of Mrs. Paragon into the well-appointed house of Uncle Henry. Henry had arranged that henceforth his sister should live with him; that Peter should look to him as a guardian, and think of himself as his uncle's inheritor. All these new arrangements passed high over Peter's head. They were a background of rumour and confusion to days of exquisite sensibility and peace. Only one thing really mattered. Uncle Henry's house was in the fashionable road that ran parallel to that in which Peter was born,

so that Peter could reach Miranda by way of the garden, which met hers at the wall's end.

Adolescence carried him high and far, winging his fancy, giving to the world forms and colours he had never yet perceived. His passion, unaware of its physical texture, had almost disembodied him. Miranda focussed the rays of his soul, and drew his energy to a point. He was pure air and fire. Standing on the high balcony of his new room, he felt that, were he to leap down, he must float like gossamer. Or, as he lay in the grass beside Miranda, staring almost into the eye of the sun, he acknowledged a kinship with the passing birds, imagined that he heard the sap of the green world ebb and flow; or, pressing his cheeks to the cool earth, he would seem to feel it spinning enormously through space.

They talked hardly at all, and then it was of some small intrusion into their happy silence — the chatter of a bird in distress or the ragged flying of a painted moth. Only seldom did Peter turn to assure himself that Miranda was still beside him. He was absorbed with his own vast content and gratitude for the warm and lovely world, his precious agony of aspiration towards the inexpressible, his sense of immense, unmeasured power. Miranda was his precious symbol. Uttered in her, for his intimate contemplation, he spelled the message with which the air was burdened, which shivered on the vibrating leaves, and burned in the summer heat. When, after long

gazing into blue distances of air, he turned to find Miranda, it seemed that the blue had broken and yielded its secret.

From the balcony of his room at night he saw things so lovely that he stood for long moments still, as though he listened. The trees, massed solemnly together, waited sentiently to be stirred. The stars drew him into the deep. Voices broke from the street. Light shining from far windows, and the smoke of chimneys fantastically grouped, filled him with a sense of pulsing, intimate life; a world of energy whose stillness was the measure of its power, the slumber of a bee's wing.

One of the far lighted windows belonged to Miranda. He was content to know she was there, and recalled, clear in his mind's eye, the lines and gestures of her face. The beauty he saw there had seemed almost to break his heart. It wavered upon him alternate with the stars and the dark trees of the garden. Loveliness and a perpetual riddle delicately lurked in the corners of her mouth. Sometimes, when they were together, he would lay his finger very softly on Miranda's lips.

He rarely kissed her. The flutter of his pulse died under an ecstasy bodiless as his passion for the painted sky. He did not yet love the girl who sometimes with a curious ferocity flung her arms about him and crushed his face against her shabby dress. Rather he loved the beauty of the world and his inspired ability, through her, to embrace it.

## XI

THE time had now come for Peter to be removed to Oxford. Amid all the novelty, the unimagined comfort and dignity, the beginning of new and exciting friendships, the first encounter with men of learning and position, Peter kept always a region of himself apart, whither he retired to dream of Miranda. He wrote her long and impassioned letters, pouring forth a flood of impetuous imagery wherein her kinship with all intense and lovely things persisted in a thousand shapes. But gradually, under many influences, a change prepared.

First, there was his contact with the intellectual life of Gamaliel. His inquisitive idealism gradually came down from heaven, summoned to definite earth by the ordered wisdom of Oxford. He had lately striven to catch, in a net of words, inexpressible beauty and elusive thought. But his desire to push expression to the limit of the comprehensible; his gift of nervous, pictorial speech; the crowding truths, half seen, that filled his brain were now opposed and estimated according to sure knowledge and the standards which measure a successful examinee. Truth, for ever about to show her face, at whose unsubstantial robe Peter had sometimes caught, now appeared formal, severe, gowned, and reading a schedule. All the knowledge of the world, it seemed, had been reduced to

categories. Style was something that dead authors had once achieved. It could be ranged in periods and schools, some of which might with advantage be imitated. Peter found that concerning all things there were points of view. An acquaintance with these points of view and an ability rapidly to number them was almost the only kind of excellence his masters were able to reward.

The result of Peter's contact with the tidy, well-appointed wisdom of Gamaliel was disastrous. His imagination, starting adventurously into the unknown, was systematically checked. This or that question he was asking of the Sphinx was already answered. He fell from heaven upon a passage of Hegel or a theory of Westermarck.

Peter quickened his disillusion by the energy and zeal of his reading. He threw himself hungrily upon his books, and gloried in the ease with which wisdom could be won and stored for reference. His ardour for conquest, by map and ruler, of the kingdoms of knowledge lasted well through his first term. Only obscurely was he conscious of clipped wings.

Hard physical exercise also played a part in bringing Peter to the ground. He was put into training for the river, and was soon filled with a keen interest in his splendid thews. Stretched at length in the evening, warm with triumphant mastery of some theorem concerning the Absolute First Cause, Peter saw himself as typically a live intellectual animal. Less and less did he live in



outer space. He began athletically to tread the earth.

Then, too, Peter made many friends — friends who in some ways were older than he. He thought of Miranda as an elfin girl, but his friends talked of women in a way Peter had never heard. For Peter sex had been one of the things which he seemed always to have known. It had not insistently troubled him. He now encountered it in the conversation of his friends as something stealthily comic, perturbing and curiously attractive. He did not actively join in these conversations, but they affected him.

The week slid away, and term was virtually at an end. Peter sat alone in his room with Miranda's last letter. In his ears the rhythm of oars and the hum of cold wet air yet remained, drowning the small noises of the fire. Miranda's letter was bitterly reproachful — glowing at the top heat of a lovers' quarrel. Miranda felt Peter's absence more than he could do. She now had nothing but Peter, and already she was a woman. Unconsciously she resented Peter's imaginative ecstasies. She wanted him to hold and to see. When he answered her from the clouds she was desolate. Moreover, Peter wrote much of his work and play; and Miranda, afraid and jealous of the life he was leading in Oxford, was tinder for the least spark of difference.

The letter Peter held in his hand was all wounded passion. He could see her tears and the

droop of her mouth trembling with anger. He had neglected a request she had made. He had written instead a description of the boat he had helped to victory. Something in Miranda's letter — something he had not felt before — caught suddenly at a need in him as yet unknown. He realised all at once that he wanted her to be physically there. He read again her burning phrases and felt the call to him of her thwarted hunger — felt it clearly beneath her superficial estrangement and reproach. He flung himself desperately back into his chair and remained for a moment still. Then he sprang up and wandered restlessly in the dim room, at last pausing by the mantelpiece and turning the lamp upon her photograph. It had caught the full, enigmatic curve of her mouth, breaking into her familiar sad smile. Peter was abruptly invaded with a secret wish, his blood singing in his ears, his heart throbbing painfully, a longing to make his peace possessing him. He felt curiously weak — almost as if he might fall. The room was twisting under his eyes. He flexed his muscles and closed his eyes in pain. Then, in deep relief, he, in fancy, bent forward and kissed her.

He decided to plead with her face to face, and he let pass the intervening day in a luxury of anticipation. He dwelled, as he had not before, on her physical grace. He would sweep away all her sorrow in passionate words uttered upon her lips.

He reached his uncle's house by an earlier train than was expected. His mother was not at home, and he went to his room unchallenged. Out on the balcony the wind roared to him through the bare trees. It was warm for a December evening, and very dark. He looked towards Miranda's house — a darker spot on the dark; for there was no light in the windows. It thrilled him to see how dark it was; and as he went through the garden towards her, with the wind about him like a cloak, drawn close and impeding him, he was glad of the freedom and secrecy it seemed to promise. He could call aloud in that dark wind, and his words were snatched away. His lips and face were trembling, but it did not matter, for the darkness covered them.

At last he stood by the house. The door was half-open. His fancy leaped at Miranda waiting for him. He had only to enter, and he pressed in her comfortable arms.

He pushed open the door, and a hollow echo ran into many rooms and died away upstairs. He was sensible now, in shelter from the wind, of a stillness he had never known. It shot into him a quick terror. As he stood and listened, he could hear water dripping into a cistern somewhere in the roof. The door was blown violently shut, and the report echoed as in a cavern. The house was empty.

Peter lighted a match, and held it above his head. He saw that the linoleum had been torn

from the floor; that the kitchen was empty of furniture; that the dust and rubbish of removal lay in the four corners. The match burnt his fingers and went out. Every sensation died in Peter. He stood in the darkness, hearing small noises of water, the light patter of soot dislodged from the chimney, the creak and rustle of a house deserted.

When his eyes were used to the dark, he moved towards a glimmer from the hall-door. He could not yet believe what he saw. He expected the silence of his dream to break. Mechanically he went through the house, standing at last under the eaves of Miranda's attic-room. His eyes, straining to the far corner, traced the white outline of the sloping ceiling. He stood where Miranda had so often slept, a wall's breadth from himself.

The water dripped pitilessly in the roof, and Peter, poor model of an English boy, lay in grief, utterly abandoned, his clenched hands beating the naked floor.

## XII

THERE was a veiled expression in Peter's eyes that evening when he met his mother. Passion was exhausted. He divined already that Miranda was irrecoverable, that pursuit was useless. He now clearly understood how and why she had suffered. His late agony in her room she had many times endured, looking in his letters for a passion not yet illumined, eager to find that he needed her, but finding always that she lived in a palace of cloud. He saw now that Miranda's love had never been the dreaming ecstasy from which he himself had just awakened. He remembered and understood what he had merely accepted as characteristic of her turbulent spirit — sudden fits of petulance, occasions when without apparent reason she had flung savagely away from him. There were other things which thrilled him now, as when her arms tightened about his neck, and she answered his light caress with urgent kisses.

Peter's mother gave him a note in Miranda's hand:

“ PETER,— We are going to Canada, and I am not going to write to you. I think, Peter, you are only a boy, and one day you will find out whether you really loved me. I am older than

you. I shall not come back to you, because you are going to be rich, and your friends cannot be my friends. If you had answered my last letter, perhaps I could not have done this. But it is better."

When Peter had finished reading he saw that his mother was watching him. He was learning to notice things. His mother, too, he had never really regarded except in relation to himself. Yet she had seen unfold the tale of his passion. She, too, had been affected. He passed her the letter, and waited as she read.

"You know, mother, what this means?" he asked, shyly moved to confide in her.

"Yes, Peter, I think I do," she answered, glad of his trust.

Peter bent eagerly towards her. "Can you tell me where they have gone?"

Mrs. Paragon gently denied him:

"No one knows. They left very quickly. Mr. Smith owed some money."

It pained her so sordidly to touch Peter's tragedy.

"He ran away?" concluded Peter, squarely facing it.

Mrs. Paragon bent her head. Peter tried to say something. He wanted to tell his mother how suddenly precious to him was her knowledge and understanding. But he broke off and his

mouth trembled. In a moment she had taken him as a child.

At last she spoke to him again, wisely and bravely:

“Try to put all this away,” she pleaded. “You are too young. I want you to be happy with your friends.”

She paused shyly, a little daunted by the thought in her mind. Then she quietly continued:

“I don’t want you to think yet of women.”

She continued to urge him:

“Life is so full of things. You think now only of this disappointment, but, Peter dear, I want you to be strong and famous.”

Her words, years afterwards to be remembered, passed over Peter’s head. He hardly knew what she said. He was conscious only of her tenderness — his first comfort. It was the consecration of their discovered intimacy.

Uncle Henry was away from home — not expected for several days. Peter was grateful for this. He could not have met the rosy man with the heartiness he required. Peter spent the evening talking to his mother of Oxford and his new friends. She quietly insisted that he should.

But, when Peter was alone once more in his room, his grief came back the deadlier for being held away. He sat for half an hour in the dark. Then he left the room and knocked at his mother’s door.

"Is that you, Peter?"

"I want to talk to you."

The door was not locked and she called him in. He had a plan to discuss, but it could have waited. He merely obeyed a blind instinct to get away from his misery. His mother leaned from the bed on her elbow, and Peter sat beside her. She raised her arm to his shoulder with a gesture slow and large. Peter insensibly found comfort in her beauty. He had never before realised his mother was beautiful. Was it the open calm of her forehead or her deep eyes?

"Can't you sleep, dear?" she asked.

"I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

Mrs. Paragon tranquilly waited.

"I want to go away," said Peter. "I can't bear to be so near to everything."

Mrs. Paragon was immediately practical.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked.

"I could spend the vacation in London," suggested Peter.

"What will your uncle say?"

"Tell him everything."

Mrs. Paragon smiled at herself explaining Peter's tragedy to Uncle Henry.

"You want to go at once?"

"Please."

Peter's mother looked wistfully, with doubt in her heart. Her hand tightened on his arm.



“ I wonder,” she almost whispered. “ Can I trust you to go ? ”

She looked at him with her calm eyes.

“ Peter,” she said at last, “ you still belong to me. You must come back to me as my own. Do you understand ? ”

Peter saw yet deeper into his mother’s heart — the mother he had so long neglected to know. Her question hung in the air, but he could not trust his voice. His eyes answered her in an honourable promise. Then suddenly he bent his head to her bosom. Her arms accepted him.

Scarcely half an hour later Peter was fast sleeping in his room. Already the torrent of his life was breaking a fresh channel. He had dedicated himself anew.

### XIII

PETER reached London in the late afternoon. Already he was looking forward.

His impetuous desire to get away from Hamingburgh was blind obedience to an instinct of his youth to have done with things finished. He was most incredibly young. His late agony for Miranda left him only the more sensitive to small things that tended to be more freshly written upon his mind. It might crudely be said that his first impulse was to forget Miranda. He had in a few hours burnt out the passion of several years; and he already was seeking unawares fresh fuel to light again his fire upon a hearth which suddenly was cold.

The intensity of his need to feel again the blow which his checked aspiration towards Miranda had so suddenly kindled was leading him blindly out and away from her. Paradoxically he was starting away from Miranda upon a pilgrimage to find her — a pilgrimage which could only come full circle when again the passion she had raised could be felt and recognised. The penalty of his early visitation by the Promethean spark was about to be exacted. Henceforth life must be a restless and a perpetual adventure. London now was his immediate quest, a quest which seemingly had

nothing now to do with Miranda, though ultimately it confessed her.

A mild excitement struggled into his mind as the train plunged him deeper and deeper into the city. London, the centre of the world, was spread before him.

He took rooms in Cursitor Street at the top of a tall building. His sitting-room opened upon Chancery Lane. There was a sober gateway into a quadrangle which suggested Oxford.

That evening Peter, muffled in a heavy coat, rode for hours upon the omnibuses. His first excursion, in the early evening, presented the workers of London pouring home. The perpetual roar and motion of this multitude soothed Peter, and gradually crushed in him all sense of personal loss. He began to feel how small was his drop of sorrow. At a crossing of many streets he saw a man knocked down by a horse. The hum and drift of London hardly paused. The man was quickly lifted into a cab and hurried away. Many passengers in the waiting omnibuses on the pavement were unaware that anything had happened. The incident profoundly affected Peter. In this great torrent of lives it seemed that the mischance of one was of no importance.

Late at night he stood in the bitter cold outside one of the theatres. The doors were suddenly flung open, and the street was broken up with jostling cabs and a babel of shouting and whistling. Delicately dressed women waited on the pavement

or were whirled away in magnificent, shining cars. Peter caught some of their conversation: fragments of new plans for meeting, small anxieties as to whether some trivial pleasure would be quite perfect, comments on the play they had seen — wisps of talk reflecting beautiful, proud lives.

In a few moments the street was silent again. The wretched loafers who had swarmed about the doors, thrusting forward their services, vanished as swiftly as they had appeared.

For the next few days Peter tramped London from end to end. He realised its bitter contrasts and brutal energy. He lived only with his Oxford books and with this growing vision of modern life superficially inspected. He began to think. He did not look for any of the men he knew, but brooded and watched alone.

From his window in the morning he saw the workers pass — girl-clerks and respectable young men, afterwards the solicitors; and, passing through the gates in front of him, men with shining hats, keen-faced and seeming full of prosperous respectability. A man with one arm sold papers from a stand at the corner. Several times, as the day passed, a pale and urgent youth would fly down the street on a bicycle, dropping a parcel of papers beside the man with one arm. Peter traced these bicycles one day to a giant building where the papers were printed.

Peter read in the middle part of the morning. For lunch he went East into the City or West into

the Strand. In the East he lunched beside men of commerce — men who ate squarely and comfortably from the joint or grill. West he lunched with clerks and people from the shops, with actors and journalists, publishers and secretaries.

In the afternoon Peter sometimes walked into the region of parks and great houses. He saw the shops and the women. Bond Street particularly fascinated him. Somehow it seemed just the right place for the insolent and idle people who at night flashed beside him in silk and fur. One afternoon he went at random from far West to far East, touching extremes, and once he went by boat to Greenwich, curiously passing the busy and wonderful docks. He knew also the limitless drab regions to the north and west — cracks between London and the better suburbs.

Gradually the monster took outline and lived in his brain. He watched the lesser people passing from their work and followed them to villas in Hammersmith or Streatham. The shiny hats he tracked to Kensington; the furred women in Bond Street to some near terrace or square.

All that Peter saw, or filled in for himself, though it took shape in his mind, did not yet drive him into an attitude. He was interested. The sleeping wretches on the Embankment; men who stopped him for pence, women who stole about the streets by night, were all part of this vivid and varied life he was learning to know. It was not yet called to account. It was just observed.

But the train was laid for an intellectual explosion. London waited to be branded as a city of slaves, with beggary in the streets and surfeit in men's houses.

He went one evening to a theatre. A popular musical comedy was running into a second edition. Peter had never before visited a theatre since as a boy he had seen the plays of Shakespeare presented by a travelling company at home.

He watched the people from an upper part of the house. The women attracted him most. They were more easily placed than the men. He could better imagine their lives. Their faces and clothes and manners were more eloquent of position and character. Peter was amazed at the diversity of the stalls — substantial dames, platitudes in flesh and blood, whom he instinctively matched with the men who lunched solidly to the east of Fleet Street; women, beside them, who breathed ineffable distinction; vivacious young girls bright with pleasure and health; women, beside them, boldly putting a final touch to an elaborate complexion. Other parts of the house were more of a kind. The balcony beneath him presented a solid front of formal linen and dresses in the mean of fashion. Topping all, in the gallery, was a dark array of people, notably drab in the electric blaze.

Except from the conversation of his Oxford friends Peter was quite unprepared for the entertainment that followed. At first it merely be-

wildered him. The perfunctory sex pantomime between the principal players; recurring afflictions of the chorus into curious movements; the mechanical embracing and caressing; the perpetual erotic innuendo — this was all so unintelligible and strange, so entirely outside all that Peter felt and knew about life, that his imagination hesitated to receive it. Gradually, however, there stole into his brain a mild disgust.

Finally there was a ballet. Its principal feature was a stocking dance. Eight young women appeared in underclothing, and eight of their total sixteen legs were clad in eight black stockings — the odd stockings being evenly divided. The first part of the ballet consisted in eight black stockings being drawn upon the eight legs which were bare. The second part of the ballet consisted in removing eight original black stockings from the legs adjacent. The ballet was performed to music intended to seduct, and the girls crooned an *obbligato* to the words, "Wouldn't you like to assist us?"

Peter flushed into astonishment and anger. He felt as if a strange hand had suddenly drawn the curtain from the most secret corner of his being. He felt as though he had been publicly stripped. He drew himself tightly back into his seat.

The curtain dropped, and the lights went up for an interval. People in the stalls talked and smiled. No flutter of misgiving troubled the marble breasts of the great ladies. Men looked

as before into the eyes of their women. Nothing, it seemed, had happened.

Peter was amazed — his brain on fire with vague phrases of contempt. His fingers shook in a passion of wrath as he gathered up his hat and coat.

Missing his way, he went into the bar. It was crowded with white-fronted men, their hats set rakishly back, discussing with freedom and energy the quality of the entertainment. Nothing of what Peter had seen or felt seemed to have touched them. Suddenly Peter was greeted:

“Hullo, Paragon!”

The Hon. Freddie Dundoon was a Gamaliel man — one for whom Peter and the college generally had much contempt, an amiable fool, of good blood, but, as sometimes happens, of no manners or intelligence.

Peter muttered a greeting and passed on. But he was not so easily to get away. Dundoon caught him by the arm.

“You’re not going?” he protested.

“Yes, I am,” said Peter, turning away his head. He did not like people who breathed into his face.

“Stuff. Come and have a brandy and soda.”

“No, thanks.”

“What’s the hurry?”

Peter stood in bitter patience, too exasperated to speak.

“Won’t you really have a drink?” Dundoon persisted.



"No, thanks," Peter wearily repeated.

"Come home and see the mater. She's your sort. Books and all that."

"Many thanks," said Peter more politely. "I'm afraid I can't."

"Sorry you won't stop. I'd take you to Miss Beryl. Third stocking from the right."

"Curse you. Let me get out of this."

Peter wrenched his arm rudely away. He blundered into a pendulous fat man in the door, and turned to apologise. Dundoon was still looking after him, his jaw fallen in a vacant surprise.

Peter thankfully breathed the cold pure air of the street. He walked at random. He tried to collect himself, to discover why he had felt so bitterly ashamed, so furiously angry. His young flesh was in arms. He had seen a travesty of something he felt was, in its reality, great and clean. His senses rebelled against the mockery to which they had been invited. Sex was coming to the full in Peter. It waited in his blood and brain. He was conscious in himself of a sleeping power, and conscious that evening of an attempt to degrade it. He shrank instinctively.

Men at Gamaliel had called him a Puritan. He chafed at the term, feeling in himself no hostility or distrust of life. It was the sly, mechanical travesty of these things, peeping out of their talk, which offended him. To-night he had seen this travesty offered to a great audience of men and women. Brooding on a secret which had painted

the butterfly and tuned the note of an English bird, he had seen it to-night, for the first time, as a punctual gluttony. Impatiently he probed into the roots of his anger. It was not sex which thus had frightened him, but its prostitution in the retinue of formal silliness.

The audience he found incredible. Either the entertainment meant nothing at all or it was hideously profane. But the witnesses, whose diversity of class, sex, age, and habit he had so enviously noted before the curtain rose, seemed to see nothing at all. Mentally he made an exception of the man from Gamaliel. He at any rate seemed to have a scale of intelligible values — a scale whereby the third stocking from the right could be accurately placed.

Peter had walked for about an hour. He had wandered in a circle and found himself again outside the theatre he had left. The people were streaming on to the pavement, unaffectedly happy after an evening of formal fun — men and women who had been held in the grip of life, or who stood, as Peter stood, upon the threshold, yet who apparently did not object to witness a parody of their great adventure in a ballet of black stockings. He watched the street noisily emptying as the audience scattered. Soon he stood lonely and still, tired of the puzzle, his anger exhausted.

A hand was slipped gently under his arm. He looked into a pretty childish face, and realised that the woman was addressing him.

“You are waiting?” she suggested.

Peter stared at her for a moment — not realising. She met him with a professional smile, her eyes filmy with a challenge, demurely evading him. He understood, and shrank rudely away from her, with a quick return of his anger. He saw in her face an effort to steel herself against his impulsive recoil. He felt the repercussion of her shame.

But it passed. Her mouth hardened. She took her hand from his arm, and mocking him with a light apology, slipped quietly away.

Peter moved impetuously forward. He felt a warm friendliness for the woman in whom he had read a secret agony. For the first time that evening he had come into touch with a fellow. She, too, felt something of what was troubling him. His gesture of sympathy was not perceived. He watched her dwindling down the street, and started to follow her. She was allied with him against a world which had conspired to degrade them.

Then he saw she was no longer alone. She stood talking with a man upon the pavement. Her companion hailed a cab, and they drove away together, passing Peter where he had paused, transfixed with a pain at his heart.

Was it jealousy? Peter flung out his hands at the stars; tears of impotent rage came into his eyes. The pain he endured was impersonal jealousy for a creature desecrated. He was jealous not for the woman whose soul for a moment he had touched, but for life itself profaned.

## XIV

ALL that night, with his window wide to the cold air, Peter pondered the life of London. Early next day, his head confused with grasping at ideas whereby intellectually to express his disgust, he went into the streets.

He walked into a broad Western thoroughfare famous for cheap books. Embedded among the more substantial warehouses was an open stall which Peter had frequently noticed. The books in this shop were always new, always cheap, very strangely assorted, and mostly by people of whom Peter had never heard. There were plays, pamphlets, studies in economy and hygiene, in mysticism and the suffrage, trade-unionism and lyric poetry, Wagner and sanitation. Peter looked curiously at an inscription in gold lettering above the door: "The Bomb Shop."

The keeper of the stall came forward as Peter lingered. He was tall, with disordered hair, neatly dressed in tweeds. He looked at Peter in a friendly way — obviously accessible.

"You are reading the inscription?" he said politely.

"What does it mean?" Peter asked.

"Have you looked at any of the books?"

"They seemed to be mixed."

"They are in one way all alike."

"How is that?"

"Explosive."

The keeper of the stall looked curiously at Peter, and began to like his ingenuous face.

"Come into the shop," he said, and led the way into its recesses.

"This is not an ordinary shop," he explained, as Peter began to read some titles. "I am a specialist."

"What is your subject?" Peter formally inquired.

"Revolution. Every book in this establishment is a revolutionary book. All my books are written by authors who know that the world is wrong, and that they can put it right."

"Who know that the world is wrong?" Peter echoed.

"That's the idea."

"I know that the world is wrong," said Peter wearily. "I want to know the reason."

"It's a question of temperament," said the bookman. "Some like to think it is a matter of diet or hygiene. Here is the physiological, medical, and health section. Some think it is a question of beauty and ugliness. The art section is to your right. Or perhaps you are an economist?"

Peter, who had not yet compassed irony, looked curiously at his new friend.

"Seriously?" he said at last, and paused irresolutely.

"You want me to be serious?"

"I've been in London for five days. Last night I was at a theatre. Then a woman spoke to me in the street. I don't understand it."

"What don't you understand?"

"I don't understand anything."

The bookman began to be interested.

"Have you any money?" he briefly inquired.

Peter pulled out a bundle of notes. "Are these any good?" he asked.

The bookman looked at the notes, and at Peter with added interest.

"This is remarkable," he decided. "You seem to be in good health, and you carry paper money about with you as if it were rejected manuscript. Yet you want to know what's wrong with the world. Have you read anything?"

"I have read Aristotle's *Ethics*, Grote's *History of Greece*, and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. I'm a Gamaliel man," said Peter.

The bookman's eyes were dancing.

"Can you spend five pounds at this shop?"

"Yes," said Peter dubiously.

"Very well. I'll make you up a parcel. You shall know what is wrong with the world. You will find that most of the violent toxins from which we suffer are matched with anti-toxins equally violent. This man, for instance," said the bookman, reaching down a volume, "explains that liberty is the cause of all our misfortunes."

He began to put together a heap of books on the counter.

"Nevertheless," he continued, adding a volume to the heap, "a too rigid system of State control is equally to blame. Here, on the other hand, is a book which tells us that London is unhappy because the sex energy of its inhabitants is suppressed and discouraged. Here, again, is a book — *Physical Nirvana* — which condemns sex energy as the root of all human misery. You tell me that last night a woman spoke to you in the street. Here is a writer who explains that she is a consequence of long hours and low wages. But she is equally well explained by her own self-indulgence and love of pleasure."

He broke off, the books having by this time grown to a pile.

"There is a lot to read," said Peter.

"It seems a lot," the bookman reassured him.

"But these modern people are easy thinkers."

Peter looked suspiciously at the bookman.

"You don't take these books very seriously yourself."

"But I've read them," said the bookman.

"You'd better read them too. It's wise to begin by knowing what people are writing and thinking. It saves time. Read these books, and burn them — most of them, at any rate."

Peter left the shop wondering why he had wasted five pounds. He drifted towards Traf-

algar Square and met a demonstration of trade-unionists with flying banners and a brass band that played a feeble song for the people. He followed them into the square, and joined a crowd which collected about the foot of the Monument.

The speeches raised a sleeping echo in Peter's brain, a forgotten ecstasy of devotion to his father's cause. The speaker harshly and crudely denounced the luxury of the rich as founded upon the indigence of the poor, dwelling on just those brutal contrasts of London which had already touched Peter. The speaker's bitter eloquence moved him, but the narrow vulgarity of his attack was disconcerting. Peter was sure that life was not explained by the simple villainy of a few rich people.

He walked away from the crowd towards Westminster, trying to realise as an ordered whole his distracting vision of London. The dignity of Whitehall was mocked in his memory by eight black stockings, by the provoking eyes of the man at the bookshop, by the fleeting shame of a strange woman who had spoken to him in the street.

Peter thought again of his father and of the books they had read. His father had rightly rebelled. All was not well. On the other hand, Peter got no help from his father's books. They had prepared in him a revolutionary temper; but they were clearly not pertinent to anything Peter had seen. They dealt with battles that were won already — problems that had passed. Priests and



Kings, Liberty and Toleration, Fraternity and Equality — all these things were historical.

Early that evening, with his window open to the noises of London, he began to struggle through the wilderness of modern revolutionary literature. Book after book he flung violently away. His quick mind rejected the slovenly thought of the lesser quacks.

At last he came upon a book of plays and prefaces by an author whose name was vaguely familiar — a name which had penetrated to Oxford. Peter began to read.

Here at last was — or seemed to be — the real thing. Soon his wits were leaping in pursuit of the most active brain in Europe — a brain, too, which dealt directly with the thronging puzzles of to-day. Peter exulted in the clean logic of this writer — the first writer he had met who wrote of the modern world.

Peter's excitement became almost painful as he found passages directly bearing upon things he had himself observed, giving them coherence, stripping away pretence. Peter, vaguely aware that life was imperfect, his mind new-stored with pictures that distressed and puzzled him, now came into touch with a keen destructive intelligence which brought society tumbling about his ears in searching analysis, impudent and rapid wit, in a rush of buoyant analogy and vivid sense — an intelligence, moreover, with a great gift of literary expression, at the same time eloquent and

familiar. It seemed as if the writer were himself present in the room, talking personally to the reader.

Peter hunted from the pile of books all of this author he could find, and sat far into the night, breaking from mood to mood. Many times he audibly laughed as he caught a new glimpse of the human comedy. In turn he was angry, triumphant, and deeply pitiful. Above all, he was aware in himself of a pleasure entirely new — a pleasure in life intellectually viewed. He felt he would never again be the same after his contact with the delicate machinery of this modern mind. Once or twice he shut the book he was reading and lay back in his chair. His brain was now alive. It went forward independently, darting upon a hundred problems, ideas, and questions, things he had felt and seen.

He even began to criticise and to differ from the author whose book had shocked his brain into life. Peter had only needed the spur; and now he answered, passing in review the whole pageant of things respectable and accepted. His young intellect frisked and gambolled in the Parliament and the Churches; stripping Gamaliel; exploding categories; brandishing its fist in the noses of all reverend names, institutions, and systems; triumphantly yelling as the firm and ancient world cracked and tumbled.

Tired at last, he shut the last of many volumes and went to bed, not without a look of contempt

towards the corner whither his Oxford studies had previously been hurled. His brain shouted with laughter in despite of his learned University. Derisively he shut his eyes, too weary to be quite sure whether he precisely knew what he was deriding.

He woke late in the morning, the winter sun shining brilliantly into his room. Revolutionary literature lay to right and left — the small grey volumes which had precipitated his intellectual catastrophe quietly conspicuous in a small heap by themselves. Peter walked to the window and looked into the street. It was altogether the same, with men of law in shining hats passing under the archway opposite into their quiet demesne. London stood solidly as before. Peter looked a little dubiously at the grey books. They, too, apparently were real.

## XV

PETER was at home for a day before returning to Oxford. Hamingburgh seemed to have grown very small and quiet. He felt in coming back a loss of energy. In London he had seemed at the heart of a hundred questions. He had watched the London crowds with intimacy. They were very real. He lost this reality in the quiet streets of Hamingburgh. Life ceased to ask urgently for an explanation.

He noted on his way from the station that people were moving into Miranda's empty house. But it hardly seemed to matter.

Peter enjoyed one happy evening with his mother, and left for Oxford.

But Oxford had disappeared. Where was the beautiful city — offering illimitable knowledge, sure wisdom, lovely authority? Peter had come into touch with life. He had craved to find order and beauty in the pageant of London. Now, in the stones of Oxford, he saw only the frozen ideas of a vanished age — serene accomplishment whose finality exasperated him. He looked from his window across the shaven green of a perfect lawn to the chapel tower. The hour chiming in quarters from a dozen bells marked off yet another small distance between Oxford and the living day.

His disillusion of the previous term was now openly confessed and examined.

Peter was not alone. Gamaliel drew to itself some excellent brain. It was celebrated for young men prematurely wise — young men who had learned everything at twenty-two, and never afterwards added to their store. Peter became a leading character in the intellectual set. They jested in good Greek, filling their heads with knowledge they affected to despise, taking in vain the theories of their masters, merrily playing with their grand-sires' bones of learning. They snorted with delight at the efforts of their chief clerical instructor to evade the Rabelaisian obscenities of Aristophanes or a too curious inquiry into certain social habits of old Greece. They reduced Hegel to half-sheets of paper, suggested profanely various readings for Petronius, speculated without reverence on the darker habits of mankind from Aristotle to the Junior Prior. But in all this horseplay of minds young and keen was a strain of contemptuous fatigue. Gamaliel, out of its clever youngsters, bred civil servants, politicians, or university professors. Intellectual pedantry waited for those whom Gamaliel intellectually satisfied. Intellectual cynicism — the cynicism of a firm belief that nothing is important or new — waited for those who played the game of scholarship with humour enough to find it barren.

Peter, therefore, was not alone in his reaction against the formal discipline of the College, but he

was alone in the obstinate ardour of his youth. He had just discovered that life was absorbing. Though he sat far into many nights in scholarly gymnastics with his friends, he came away to watch the grey light creeping into a world he keenly wanted to understand. He jested only with his brain, driven to the game by physical energy and friendly emulation. He was never really touched by the cynicism and horse laughter of his set. He often left these meetings in a sudden access of desolation.

Peter's directors began sadly to shake their heads. They knew the symptoms — knew he was already marked for failure. The Warden gravely reasoned with him.

"Mr. Paragon," he said, handing Peter his papers for the term, "these are second class."

Peter was mortified. His intellectual comrades mocked, but they also satisfied, their masters. Peter was of another fibre. He could do nothing without his entire heart. Various readings in Horace no longer fired him. The kick had gone out of his work. His brain was elsewhere.

He took the papers in silence. He could not understand his failure. Hitherto satisfying the examiners had been for Peter a matter of course.

"You have neglected your reading?" the Warden suggested, as Peter turned silently away.

"No, sir."

"Won't you take us a little more seriously?"

"I cannot be interested," Peter shot out impulsively.

"Is this wise?" the Warden gravely inquired. "We expect you to do well."

"I will try, sir."

Peter was sad, but not sullen.

"You owe it to the College," said the Warden, drily incisive. Then he added: "Why must you go so quickly, Mr. Paragon? You are not yet ready for things outside."

Peter was suddenly grateful. He was, at any rate, understood.

"I will try with my whole soul," he ardently exclaimed.

"Meanwhile," the Warden concluded with a smile, "notes on gobbets need not be written in the manner of La Rochefoucauld. There isn't time."

Peter, passing into the quadrangle, met Dundoon. He was in riding breeches. He lived in riding breeches, till they became for Peter a symbol of well-born inanity. Moreover, he was freely indulging his principal pleasure — namely, he was vigorously cracking a riding-whip, making the walls ring with snap after snap.

"Hullo," he said as Peter passed within careful distance.

"Idiot," muttered Peter between his teeth.

"Freshly roasted by the Wuggins — What?"

"Dundoon, you're a damned nuisance. Put it away."

"It's most important, Peter Pagger. It's most devilish important. M.F.H.—What?"

Dundoon cracked his whip rather more successfully than usual. The snap tingled in Peter's brain. In a fit of temper he sprang at Dundoon, and wrenched the whip from his hand.

Dundoon looked at Peter's gleaming eyes as though he had seen the devil.

"What's this? In the name of Hell what is it?" he said at last.

"I'm sorry," said Peter with withering humility. "Here is your whip."

He handed it back to Dundoon, who took it cautiously. Peter moved away. But Dundoon arrested him.

"Peter Pagger," he said thoughtfully, "do I understand that you've been rude to me?"

"As you please."

"Because you'll be ragged, that's all. You'll be jolly well ragged."

The party of Dundoon was strolling up, and was invited to hear the news.

"Here, you fellows. Peter Pagger has been very rude to me. What shall we do to him? Peter Pagger has been roasted by the Wuggins for his naughty life in London. Third stocking from the right — What?"

Peter strode off boiling with anger.

Dundoon belonged to a set which derived principally from a famous English school. It was a set traditionally opposed to the intellectuals;



indeed these two principal sets fed fat an ancient grudge. College humour mainly consisted at this time in the invention of scandalous histories by members of one set concerning members of the other. Needless to say the Pagers far excelled the Dundoons in the pith of their libels, so that the Dundoons had often to assert their supremacy in other ways. Upon one cold winter night, for example, the Pagers, one and all, retiring to rest had missed a necessary vessel. Thick snow covered the garden quadrangle, of which the Dundoons had built an immense mound upon the lawn. After three days a thaw set vigorously in, and the Junior Prior, looking from his window in the dawn, was shocked by an unutterable stack of College china mocking the doubtful virginity of the snow. The enterprises of the Dundoons were not subtle.

The Junior Prior was not at this time happy. Quite recently he had himself been one of the Dundoons. He was a young professor of mathematics; and, because he was also an astronomer, they called him Peepy. He was brilliant on paper, but an admitted failure in dealing with the men. His discipline was openly flouted.

Peter, who naturally did not know that the Junior Prior was an error of judgment, confessed by the authorities, regarded him, unfairly to Gamaliel, as typical of the place. He derided in him a wholly ineffectual and pedantic person whose dignity at Gamaliel reduced life to absurdity.

Peter was barely civil to the Junior Prior. It was characteristic of the Junior Prior that he tactlessly favoured the Dundoons. They used his pet name, and paraded with him linked in familiar conversation. Naturally, when his discipline fell upon men outside the set he favoured, it was bitterly resented. It was remembered, a fact unknown to the Fellows, that in the term before Peter came to Gamaliel the Junior Prior had been pushed downstairs by a robust man from the Colonies who, though he happened to be reading theology, was old enough to be the father of the Junior Prior, and had, it was believed, actually killed people somewhere in Mexico.

The incident between Peter and Dundoon naturally splashed rather rudely into these College politics. Clearly it needed very little to raise a scandal. One of the Dundoons talked with Peter in the boat that afternoon, telling him that vengeance was intended, but Peter was wearily contemptuous.

In the evening he sat peacefully at his window. To-day they had paddled far, passing through the locks to lower reaches of the river. Peter was tired and contemplative, his brain still rocking with the boat and filled with desolate echoes of shouting over lonely water.

Big Tom was belling his hundred-and-one. The lawn was deserted and very quiet. Peter could recover distantly the rhythm of the town band. He remembered the night of his first intro-

duction to the dons of Gamaliel — the infinite promise that once had sounded in the Oxford bells.

A riotous party broke into the far corner. Peter was not long in doubt as to who they were. Dundoon was cracking his whip.

Peter sat still as they came irregularly towards him.

“Peter Pagger,” said Dundoon, not quite certain of his syllables, “we have come to rag you. Have you any objections?”

He stood below on the grass. He had been drinking and was very serious.

“None at all,” said Peter indifferently. He looked down, as it were, on a group of animals.

“He hasn’t any objections,” said Dundoon confidentially to his supporters.

“Listen to me,” he continued, addressing the open window. “This is most important. You’ve been very rude to me. What are you going to do about it?”

“I’m sitting here,” said Peter.

He heard them blundering up the wooden staircase. He might have sported a strong oak, locking them out until his friends had come together. But it hardly seemed worth while.

He leaned upright by the open window, his hands in his pockets, as the Dundoons playfully rearranged the furniture. The etiquette on an occasion like this was simple. He must not make himself ridiculous by taking too seriously the frolic of men not entirely sober. Neither must he allow

himself to be insulted. Peter looked carelessly on, very calm but alert to decide when the joke had gone as far as the decorum of Gamaliel allowed.

One of the Dundoons was arranging Peter's coal neatly upon the mantelpiece. Another was turning his pictures to the wall. His tablecloth and hearthrug were transposed. His wardrobe was assorted into heaps upon the floor and labelled for a sale by auction.

Suddenly Peter saw that Dundoon was about to empty a water-jug into the bed. Peter passed swiftly towards him.

"I don't think we'll do that," he said. "It would be nasty."

"You've been very rude to me," said Dundoon, dangerously tilting the jug.

Peter grasped him firmly by the arm and took the jug away. He put it back into the corner.

Dundoon looked at Peter for a moment in drunken meditation. Then he put his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"Peter Pagger," he said, "this is most important. Sorry to say — absolutely necessary to cleanse and purify unwholesome bed." And he walked to the corner.

Peter followed him.

"Dundoon," he said sharply.

Dundoon turned and found Peter at his elbow. Peter shook his fist under the nose of Dundoon.

"Pick up that water-jug and I'll punch your damned head."

"Here, you fellows," shouted Dundoon. "Come and hear what Peter Pagger is saying. He's been very rude to me."

The Dundoons crowded into the little bedroom, and someone called: "Take away his trousers!"

Peter stood back. There was an uproar and a movement towards him.

"Mind yourselves," he shouted. "I'm going to fight."

There was a knock at the bedroom door, and silence fell suddenly.

"Come in," called Peter, not without relief.

The Junior Prior stood in the doorway. He had heard an uproar in Peter's rooms, and he did not immediately see the company.

"Mr. Paragon," he said with the dignity of a sergeant, "what's all this noise?"

He had got as far as this when Dundoon suddenly put a fond arm around his neck.

"It's all right, Peepy," he said. "Peter Pagger's been very rude to me."

The Junior Prior changed colour, and Peter enjoyed his confusion. The Junior Prior's attempt at discipline collapsed. He had come to assert his authority over a mere member of the college, but he had fallen among friends.

"Don't you think this has gone far enough?" He almost pleaded with Dundoon.

"Peter Pagger's been very rude to me."

"Yes. But I think you ought to come away."

"But, Peepy, this is most important."

One of the Dundoons, more alive to the position than the rest, hastily pushed his leader from the room. Already the other men had discreetly vanished.

"What are you doing?" Dundoon protested.

"Come out of it, you fool," whispered the man of tact. "Don't you see you're making it awkward for Peepy?"

"Awkward for Peepy?" said Dundoon very audibly. "Why is it awkward for Peepy?"

The Junior Prior went scarlet under Peter's dancing eyes.

"Your room seems to have suffered," he dimly smiled. "I must look to Dundoon," and he dived hastily into the passage. Peter heard a sharp scuffle. He saw, in his mind's eye, the embarrassed man of authority forcing his tactless crony from sight and hearing. He flung up his hands in glee.

The story did not lose in Peter's telling. Peter improved his description as the days went by. "Awkward for Peepy," passed into the language.

The Pagers, one and all, decided that it would be extremely awkward for Peepy if, after collapsing before Dundoon, he should ever again actively interfere with themselves.

## XVI

THE term drew to an end. Peter's boat went head of the river in five bumps. There was a large dinner in the College hall, and a small dinner of Peter's friends upon the following day. This last dinner had important consequences. The toasts were many, and Peter was not a seasoned man. He put vine leaves in his hair, and scarcely conscious of his limbs, danced lightly into Gamaliel quadrangle. It was a dinner at Peter's expense, exclusively of Paggers; and at one o'clock in the morning they began to do each what his brain imagined.

Peter secured a beautiful enamel bath which belonged to Dundoon, and for an hour he could not be interrupted. To sit in the bath of Dundoon, and to clatter hideously from flight to flight of the stone steps of the College hall was a perfect experience. It never palled. Meanwhile Peter's friends had discovered an open window of the buttery, and announcements were made to Peter from time to time. Peter sat gravely in his bath and smiled.

"Rows of chickens for the evening meal," said a man from the deeps of the larder. The chickens were handed out and spread decently upon the lawn.

Reports were made of a wonderful breakfast waiting to be cooked.

"How well they provide for us," said Peter, gazing upon rows of fish, joints of beef and mutton, hams and sides of bacon. Then Peter stood up in his bath and prophesied:

"Gentlemen," he said. "All kinds of food grow upon trees of the field. I should not be at all surprised —" He broke off, sunk in contemplation of a spreading elm.

Then he again carried his bath to the head of the steps, and his friends were busy for the next half hour. At the end of that time the trees were heavy with strange fruit.

Peter was then invited to join in a choral dance; but he would not leave his bath.

He felt a sudden need for violent rhythm, and began heavily to beat the bath of Dundoon.

Windows were flung up, and protesting shouts were heard from sleepy men in garments hastily caught up. The Junior Prior, who had as long as possible refrained, saw he must intervene. He flung on a few necessary clothes and issued from his turret.

Peter lay directly in his path. He paused irresolutely at the foot of the steps.

"Mr. Paragon."

The Junior Prior asserted his authority with misgiving.

"Sir?"

"Go to your rooms."



Peter descended the steps unsteadily. Then he stopped, looking wistfully towards his bath. It was too much. He began to climb back again.

"Mr. Paragon," repeated the Junior Prior.

"Sir?"

"Need you do that again?"

"This," objected Peter with the faintest parody of Dundoon, "is most important."

The Junior Prior was seen to flush in the lamp-light.

"Mr. Paragon, come down!"

Peter sighed and again started to descend. He missed a step and fell rudely towards the Junior Prior, who stepped back to receive him. But the Junior Prior caught his slippered heel in a low iron railing that skirted the lawn, and fell with his legs in the air. Peter, caught by the parapet, gazed thoughtfully at the legs of the Junior Prior.

The Junior Prior was loosely clad. He had put his legs hastily into a pair of trousers, kept in place by the last abdominal button. Disordered by his sudden fall, the ends of the trousers projected beyond his feet.

Everything happened in a moment. Peter saw his enemy delivered up. His bland good-fellowship of the evening surrendered to Berseker rage. He stooped, and in a flash caught hold of the loose ends of the trousers. Unconscious of his enormous strength, he pulled sharp and wild. The button gave with a snap, and Peter, staggered for a moment by the recoil, was next seen rushing up

the lawn, a strange banner streaming about his head.

Peter's friends were awed into silence. The ceremony which so largely figured in conversation at Gamaliel had at last been performed, and it had been performed on the Junior Prior.

Peter, in mad rush, came upon a meditative figure. The Warden, working late into the night, was at last disturbed. He had arrived in time to see Peter staggering back from a recumbent figure in the middle distance. He watched Peter in his furious career down the lawn, and saw Peter's miserable victim glimmer hastily away into the far turret. The Warden was not ignorant of College politics. He already suspected that this was no ordinary achievement.

"Well, Mr. Paragon," he said as Peter forged into view. "Are these your property?"

He caught at the trousers, and Peter, struck comparatively sober, decided to temporise.

"They are not my property, sir. They are, f-f-th' moment, borrowed."

Peter felt very politic and clever.

"Who is the owner of this property?" asked the Warden.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot tell."

Peter was beginning to feel how impossible it was to face the fact that he had removed the trousers of the Junior Prior. He could not tell the Warden. It seemed indelicate. He wanted to cover the shame of his victim.

“ You know, of course, to whom this property belongs? ” the Warden persisted.

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ But you refuse to say. ”

Peter was struck miserably silent. He did not like to deny the Warden, but he could not utter the outrage he had committed.

“ Very well, ” said the Warden. “ I will impound the property. Doubtless it will be claimed. ”

He quietly took possession of the trousers and turned to go.

“ Mr. Paragon. ”

“ Yes, sir? ”

“ I rely on you to see that the College is in bed within the next ten minutes. I shall send for you in the morning. Good night. ”

“ Good night, sir. ”

Peter soberly reported the interview to his friends, and they decided to sleep.

Already the zest was beginning to go out of life. A comfortless grey light was beginning to peer dimly at the hanging burden of the trees.

Peter sat wakefully at his window. His revolt against the discipline of Gamaliel came merely to this — that he had removed the trousers of the Junior Prior. He had been noisy and foolish, and it had seemed the best joke in the world that his friends should give the laborious College servants at least an hour's extra work to do in the morning. A large side of bacon hanging grotesquely in the pale light intolerably mocked him

from the noble elm beside his window. He felt very old and tired. In the morning he was summoned to the Warden's house. The Warden met him seriously, as though, Peter thought, he instinctively knew how to make him ashamed.

"Well, Mr. Paragon, the property has been identified."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"I, too, am sorry, Mr. Paragon. You are sent down for the remaining days of the term, and I shall seriously have to consider whether I can allow you to come back after the vacation. I suppose you realise that the discipline of the College must be observed?"

"Yes, sir."

"The Junior Prior," the Warden continued with perfect gravity, "has been offered an important post in a Japanese university. Perhaps he will accept it. He desires to study the refraction of light in tropical atmospheres. It may therefore be possible for you to join us again next term. Otherwise I am afraid we shall have to strike you from the books. I think you understand the position, Mr. Paragon?"

"Yes, sir."

Peter cut short his friends when they asked for an account of his roasting.

"The Wuggins," he said emphatically, "is a big man. I'm going down by the seven-forty to Hamingburgh."

Peter wanted to get away without fuss, but the

Paggers would not hear of it. It was decided there must be a procession to the railway station. All the folly had gone out of Peter, but he was now helplessly a hero.

The procession started from the College gates. Fifty hansom-cabs, decorated with purple crape, formed up under the Warden's windows. The town band was hired to play a solemn march. Peter, compelled to bear the principal part in a joke which he no longer appreciated, was borne to the leading cab pale with mortification. The slow journey to the station seemed interminable. All Oxford was grinning from the creeping pavement. At last the station was reached. Peter leaped from duress, heartily cursed his friends, and, safe at last in the train, began to wonder how his uncle would receive him.

The Warden of Gamaliel had watched Peter's funeral procession from behind the curtains of his window. He smiled as he saw Peter borne forth, clearly reflecting in his expressive young face an ineffectual dislike of his notoriety. The Warden turned from the window as the strains of a solemn march weakened along the street. He smiled again that day at odd times, but sometimes he pressed his lips together and shook his head.

"Peter Paragon is a good boy," he told the Fellows at dinner, "but I don't in the least know what we are going to do with him."

## XVII

PETER spent the vacation at home solidly reading and digesting without enthusiasm the Oxford books. He soon heard from his friends that the Junior Prior had vanished, and that he himself would be invited to return. He spent his days regularly between classical literature for a task and modern literature for pleasure.

Mrs. Paragon gravely listened to Peter's story of his indiscipline. She did not, of course, find it in any way ridiculous. She brooded upon it as evidence of Peter's abounding life, and she instinctively trembled. Peter's energy was beginning to be dangerous.

Peter's uncle flung up his great head and laughed. He made Peter, to Peter's rage, recur to the story again and again, asking for unspeakable details. His red face shone and twinkled. He roared with delight.

In the middle of the vacation the author who first had stirred Peter to intellectual enthusiasm came to Hamingburgh, and talked Socialism to a local branch of the Superior Socialists. Peter was wrought to so high an admiration of the art with which the great man handled his audience, by the clarity, vigour, and wit of his speaking, that he dared at the end to ask publicly some very pertinent and searching questions. The speaker could

not answer him immediately; but afterwards promised to write to Peter if Peter would remind him.

Peter thus became one of the fortunate correspondents of an author whose private letters were better than his published works. Before he returned to Oxford he already had a small pile, thumbed with continuous reading.

Peter acquitted himself reasonably to the satisfaction of his masters when he returned to Gamaliel. He wrote without vigour or interest, but his grim industry saved him from absolute failure. All through the term he stuck hard at the necessary books, and trained hard for the summer eights. His spare energy now went into socialist oratory, blue books, and public speaking. He made sudden appearances at the Oxford Union, cutting into the debates with ferocious contempt for the politics there discussed. To Peter the world was very wrong, and it seemed easy to put it right. He denounced the imbecility of the party game — played in the midst of so much urgently calling to be done. He drowned his audiences in terrible figures and unanswerable economy. He extirpated landlords and destroyed wagery. He abolished the oldest profession in the world as accidental to a society badly run. Peter became famous as an orator. It was confidently said that next term he would be given a place on the Committee of the Union. One evening he was taken by the Proctors, prophesying from a cart in the Broad. He was

fined, ostensibly for appearing ungowned in the streets at an unlawful hour.

Peter's access of political fervour was aggravated this term by an unfortunate accident. He sprained a tendon of his leg, and had to drop out of the boat a few days before the races. The effect of this physical relaxation was to increase his energy for discontent. For several blissful days he lay upon his back in a punt upon the Char, happy to be lazy, to breathe the heavy scent of hawthorn, to be rocked by noises of water and of voices over the water. Then he began to dream; and blue books marched in the avenues of his brain, mocking the elaborate idleness of the afternoon. The week itself of the races forced once again upon his imagination the contrasts he had seen in London. The merry pageant of the river, brilliant with summer dresses; the pleasant evening parties at the Old Mitre where his mother and uncle were staying; everywhere an expensive and careless life accepted as normal — these things were bright against a dark background of neglect and oppression. Peter was now a very serious young man.

His brooding at this time was only lightened during the summer week by the presence in Oxford of his mother and uncle. There was much to arrange and to observe. Peter had been afraid of his uncle. How would his uncle behave among the Oxford people? Peter was not really happy until he had dined very near Dundoon and his



party. The father of Dundoon was a nobleman with 10,000 acres of urban land. Yet, Peter cynically reflected, you could scarcely distinguish him from Uncle Henry. He, too, had a large red face, ate with more heartiness than delicacy, and talked in an accent entirely his own. Peter breathed more freely. Instinctively he began a peroration as to aristocracy true and false, with interpolated calculations as to the possible unearned increment upon 10,000 acres conveniently near London.

Uncle Henry, of course, had to be shown exactly where the Junior Prior had fallen; and Peter had to stand by, embarrassed and fuming, while Uncle Henry rehearsed the scene in pantomime.

Peter was proud and glad to see how rapidly his friends came to praise and admire his mother. They instinctively felt her strength and peace. They began at once to confide in her, though her answers were rarely of more than one syllable. Of all Peter's friends Lord Marbury liked her best.

Marbury was at this time Peter's nearest friend at Gamaliel. Peter had met Marbury only this last term. He had one day sat next to a stranger at dinner. Finding the stranger to be a man of excellent intelligence Peter had begun vigorously to denounce the aristocracy of England. The stranger had mildly protested that English lords were rather more various in character than Peter supposed, and that perhaps they had a use in politics and society. Peter contested this, overwhelm-

ing his new friend with facts, figures, arguments, and devices for buying out all the vested interests of the nobility at a reasonable figure. Two days after, at a college ceremony which required the men to answer to their names, Peter heard with distaste that a new title was being called. He looked contemptuously round, and to his dismay saw his new friend rise in answer. Marbury smiled pleasantly at Peter and chaffed him in the best of humour.

The friendship rapidly grew. Marbury was all that a man of lively interest and fancy can be who has mixed from a boy with polite citizens of the world. He knew all that Peter had yet to learn; but Peter's world of ideas attracted him as a country unexplored. Peter less consciously drew towards Marbury as one who seemed, in all but purely intellectual things, unaccountably wise. He really felt the curb of Marbury's knowledge of things as they are, whereas Marbury delighted in Peter's enthusiasm for things as they should be.

Marbury's charm for Peter rested, too, upon his ability to talk in a perfectly natural and unaffected way of intimate and simple things. Marbury at once declared his pleasure in Peter's mother. His own people had not come to Oxford for the races, and he devoted himself almost entirely to Mrs. Paragon.

"It's pleasant just to carry her mackintosh," he said to Peter one evening after they had come from the hotel.

"I'm glad you like her."

"Like her?" protested Marbury. "Don't be inadequate. She is simply wonderful."

Peter asked himself how Marbury had discovered this.

"What have you been talking about all the evening?" he inquired.

"I haven't the least idea. Mostly nonsense."

"Then how do you know she is wonderful?"

"Peter," said Marbury, "sometimes you annoy me. It's true that I haven't the least idea what your mother thinks about the English aristocracy or George Meredith. I simply know that your mother is wonderful."

Peter leant eagerly forward:

"I understand how you feel."

"Good," jerked Marbury. "I'm glad you are not quite insensible."

He looked reflectively at Peter, and continued:

"I am almost hopeful about you now that I've met your mother. I cannot help feeling there must be some sanity in you somewhere. But where did you get all your nonsense?"

"My father was shot down in the street," said Peter briefly.

"I'm sorry," said Marbury after a pause. "I did not know."

The summer races were run to an end, and only three weeks of term remained. Peter, physically unemployed, accumulated stores of energy. He became insufferably violent in conversation, and

Marbury, after telling him to put his head in ice, said he would have no more to do with him till he no longer addressed his friends as if they were a public meeting.

That Peter did not that term fly into flat rebellion was due to a lack of opportunity. For a similar reason he continued to get through another year between Oxford and Hamingburgh. His weeks at home with his mother were like deep pools of a stream between troubled reaches. At Oxford Marbury, with his imperturbable sanity and good humour, kept him a little in check. They were inseparable. Peter would not again go on the river. He bought a horse and rode with Marbury through the winter and spring in the country about Oxford, or sailed with him in the desolate river beyond Port Meadow. Meantime he gored at his books like an angry bull, was the favourite hot gospeller of the Oxford Socialists, and was elected Secretary of the Union as an independent candidate — a fact recorded with misguided enthusiasm in the Labour press. Peter's first summer term was the model of the two which followed; and his second summer term might harmlessly have passed like the first had not Marbury been called away. Marbury was his uncle's heir, and his uncle was not expected to live through the year. Henceforth Marbury would have to spend most of his time upon his uncle's estate. Thus, in the singing month of May, and in his second year, Peter was left unbridled.

## XVIII

MARBURY had been away for three weeks when Peter was arrested one morning by a placard outside the Oxford theatre. A play was announced by a young dramatist who followed the lead of Peter's acknowledged master. Peter knew the play well, knew it was finer in quality than the majority of plays performed in London or elsewhere. There had been preliminary difficulties with the Censor as to the licensing of this play, but in the end it had been passed for public performance — not until the intellectual press had exhaustively discussed the absurdities implied in the Censor's hesitation. Peter knew by heart all the arguments for and against the Censorship of plays. Musical comedy and French farce ruled at the Oxford theatre — productions which Peter had publicly denounced as intentionally offered for the encouragement of an ancient profession. He was, therefore, agreeably pleased to read the announcement of a play morally edifying and intellectually brilliant.

But two days later a mild sensation fluttered the gossips of North Oxford and splashed into the conversation of the Common rooms. The Vicegerent of the University, who had an absolute veto upon performances at the Oxford theatre,

suddenly decided that the play must not be presented.

Peter heard the news at dinner. For the remaining weeks of the term he was a raging prophet. Too excited to eat, he left the table and walked under the trees, smouldering with plans for exposing this foolish and complacent tyranny.

First he would exhaust clearly and forcibly upon paper its thousand absurdities. Peter wrote far into the night, caught in a frenzy of inspired logic. Having argued his position point by point, having rooted it firm in reason, morality, and justice, he flung loose the rein of his indignation. He ended by the first light of day, and read over his composition in a glow of accomplishment. Surely this conspiracy must collapse in a shout of laughter.

He took his MS. to a friend who at that time was editing the principal undergraduate magazine. Half an hour later he returned to his room gleaming with fresh anger. His friend had refused to publish his MS., saying it was too rude, and that he did not want to draw the evil eye of authority. Peter called him coward, and shook his fist under the editorial nose.

In the evening he arranged with a local publisher to print a thousand copies in pamphlet form. Later he attended a seminar class under the Vicegerent, and at the end of the hour waited to speak with him.

“Well, Mr. Paragon?”

Peter was outwardly calm, but for sixty inter-

minable minutes he had boiled with impatient anger.

"Sir, I wish to resign from the seminar."

The Vicegerent detected a tremor of suppressed excitement. He looked keenly at Peter.

"What are your reasons?" he asked.

"I need more time for private reading."

"For example?"

"I am interested in the modern theatre."

Peter had intended merely to resign. He had not intended to offer reasons. But he could not resist this. The words shot rudely and clumsily out of him.

The Vicegerent saw a light in Peter's eye. He was a man of humour, and he smiled.

"H'm. This, I take it, is a sort of challenge?" he said.

"It is a protest," Peter suggested.

The Vicegerent twinkled, and Peter helplessly chafed. The Vicegerent put a gentle hand upon his arm.

"Well, Mr. Paragon, I'm sorry your protest has taken this particular form. I shall be sorry to lose you. However, your protest seems to be quite in order. So I suppose you are at liberty to make it."

"And to publish my reasons?" Peter flared.

"I have published mine," smiled the Vicegerent.

He took up a copy of the Oxford magazine, underlined a brief passage in blue pencil, and handed it to Peter. Peter read:

"The Vicegerent has decided that *Gingerbread Fair* is not a suitable play for performance at the Oxford Theatre. He does not think the moral of the play is one that can suitably be offered to an audience of young people. It will be remembered that this play was licensed by the Lord Chamberlain only after serious consideration of its ethical purport."

Peter choked.

"These are not reasons," he flamed.

"Mr. Paragon," said the Vicegerent, "this is not for discussion."

Peter dropped the magazine upon the table between them and went from the room without a word.

The Pagers joyfully roared when Peter's pamphlet issued from the press. Peter had improved it in proof with an Appendix, wherein, helped by his learned friends, he presented an anthology of indecorous passages collected from classical texts recommended for study by the Examiners. Peter explained to the world that the young people whose minds must not be contaminated by *Gingerbread Fair* would in default of its performance spend the evening with masterpieces by Aristophanes, Petronius, and Ovid of the "ethical purport" indicated in the cited examples.

Peter posted a copy of his pamphlet to every resident Master of Arts in Oxford, and awaited the result. He expected at least to rank with Shelley in conspicuous and reputable martyrdom.



But nothing happened. The Warden met him with the usual friendly smile. The Vicegerent nodded to him affably in the Corn Market. They did not seem to have suffered any rude or shattering experience. The walls of learning stood yet, solemn and grey.

Words, it seemed, were wasted. Reason was of no account. Peter was resolved somehow to be noticed. He would break down this cynical indifference of authority to truth and humour.

Upon the morning when *Gingerbread Fair* should first have been performed in Oxford, Peter saw its place upon the placards taken by a play from London. The picture of a young woman in lace knickerbockers was evidence that the play would abound in precisely that sort of indecency which, as Peter had proved in his pamphlet, must necessarily flourish in a Censor-ridden theatre. That this kind of play should, by authority, be encouraged at the expense of the new, clean drama of the militant men whom Peter loved, pricked him to the point of delirium. He then and there resolved that the day should end in riot.

The Paggers were ready. They cared not a straw for Peter's principles; but, when he suggested that the play at the Oxford theatre should be arrested, they rented four stage-boxes and waited for the word. Peter, at urgent speed, had leaflets printed, in which were briefly set forth the grounds on which the men of Oxford protested against a change of bill which substituted the

woman in knickerbockers for *Gingerbread Fair*. The play dragged on. Peter waited for the bedroom, and with grim patience watched the gradual undressing of the principal lady. He intended to make a speech.

The interruption came sooner than P eter intended. He was about to scatter his leaflets and leap to the stage when an outrageous innuendo from one of the actors inspired a small demonstration from some Pagers in the pit.

“Isn’t it shocking?” said a voice in an awed, but audible, undertone.

“Order! order!” shouted some people of the town.

There were counter-cries of “Shame!” and in a moment the theatre was in an uproar. Peter scattered his leaflets with a magnificent gesture and jumped on to the stage. The Pagers tumbled out of their boxes, arrested the stage manager in the act of lowering the curtain, and began to carry off the stage properties as lawful spoil.

Peter had counted on being able to make a speech — to explain his position with dignity. He did not know how quickly an uproar can be raised. Also he had reckoned without the Pagers. They wanted fun.

When it was over Peter remembered best the frightened eyes of the woman on the stage. For no reason at all madness had burst into the theatre. She heard a great noise, and saw Peter with a gleaming face leap towards her. She

screamed, and continued screaming, but her voice was lost.

Meantime her husband and manager, inferring that his wife had been insulted, came rushing from the wings.

Peter vainly trying to make himself heard, suddenly felt a violent push in the back. He turned and saw a furious man, apparently speaking, but his words were drowned. This man all at once hit Peter in the face.

Peter forgot all about the Censor, and shot out hard with his left. The man went down. Peter noticed that more than one person was rolling on the floor.

Seeing another member of the player's company before him with a lifted fist he hit him hard on the jaw. This man fell away, and Peter prepared to hit another. Then he noticed that the next man to be hit was a policeman; also that the Pagers were climbing hastily back into their boxes loaded with booty. He started after them, but, as he was stepping over a prostrate carcase, the carcase gripped him by the leg. He fell to the stage with a crash, knocking his head violently on the boards.

When Peter came to himself he was in the open air. The police were disputing for his body with the Senior Proctor. He sat up and felt his head. By this time the Senior Proctor had established his rights of jurisdiction, and the police, leaving Peter to the University, departed.

When Peter was able to stand, he confessed his

name and accepted a summons to appear before the Vicegerent in his court of justice. He then went back to Gamaliel.

The Pagers were assembled in his room when he returned, telling stories of the evening and dividing the spoil. There was eager competition for some of the articles, more especially for personal property of the principal lady. All such garments as she had already discarded had been thoughtfully secured. They lay in a fascinating heap upon Peter's rug. It had just been decided, when Peter arrived, that they should be knocked down to the highest bidder, and that the proceeds should be handed over to the college chaplain for charitable uses.

At sight of Peter these proceedings were interrupted. It was admitted that Peter had first claim.

"Peter," they said, "has suffered."

"I have an idea," said a man from the colonies.

"I know what Peter would like to do."

Peter was racked with headache, and sick with a sense of futility.

"Shut up, you fools," he growled at them.

"Peter is ungrateful after all we have done for him; but we know what Peter would like to do with these pretty things. He would like to wrap them up in a parcel, and send them to St. James' Palace. Won't the Lord Chamberlain be surprised? We will enclose a schedule—List of Garments Discarded by Principal Lady under the

Aegis of the Lord Chamberlain at the Oxford Theatre on the Fourteenth Instant."

"There cannot be a schedule," said another wag. "How are we to name these pretty things?"

"Our definitions will be arbitrary. Here, for instance, is a charming trifle, fragrant as flowers in April. Mark it down as 'A Transparency — Precise Function Unknown.'"

"Camisole," suggested a voice.

"Will the expert kindly come forward?"

It seemed hours before Peter, after much perfunctory ribaldry, was left alone with his remorse. The little heap of white garments accused him from the table of rowdiness and vulgarity. They filled his room with the scent of violets, and he remembered now the eyes of the woman he had so rudely frightened.

In the immediate future he saw the red tape of being formally sent down — a grave reprimand from the authorities, twinkling amusement from the Warden. They would treat him like a child. Had he not behaved like a child? All his fine passion had turned to ridicule. Peter, solitary in his room, found comfort in one thought alone. The world was waiting for him in London, where he would be received as a man, and be understood — where passion and a keen mind could be turned to high ends and worthily expended. He accused authority of his excesses, and dedicated himself afresh to resist and discredit his rulers. He was

now a responsible revolutionary, with a hard world in front of him to be accused and beaten down. He thought again of his father — now a bright legend of intellectual revolt.

Next day Peter listened quietly to all that was said to him, receiving as of course an intimation that he was finally expelled from the College. This time the funeral was spared. Peter's friends were too busy packing for the vacation. His last farewell was spoken on the platform of Oxford station. Marbury, returning for a night to college, hailed him as he jumped from the cab.

"Hullo, Peter," he said at once. "You're a famous man!"

"Don't rot."

"Have you seen the local paper?"

"Why?"

"There are some rather good headlines," answered Marbury, unfolding the sheet.

RAID UPON THE OXFORD THEATRE

SUDDEN UPROAR

DESTRUCTION OF STAGE PROPERTIES

PRINCIPAL LADY PROSTRATED WITH SHOCK

He finished reading, and handed the paper to Peter.

"What on earth have you been doing?" he asked, as Peter seized and devoured it.

Peter ran his eye over the lines. Reported in the common form of a local scribe it read like a drunken brawl.

"Were you tight?" asked Marbury briefly.

"No, I was not tight," Peter snapped. "Look here, Marbury," he continued, "this wasn't a picnic. It was damn serious."

"Serious?"

"It was a protest."

"This is interesting," said Marbury. "What was it about?"

"It was a protest," Peter declared with high dignity, "against the censorship of stage plays."

Marbury looked at Peter for a moment. Then went into peals of laughter. Peter looked at him intending to kill.

"Don't be angry, Peter. I don't often laugh. But this is funny."

"I don't agree with you."

"Peter, dear boy, come away from your golden throne."

Marbury smoothed his face. "I suppose this means you're going down for good."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"Look me up in London. I'm going down myself next term."

"Sick of it?" asked Peter.

"Not at all. But my uncle is far from well, and I'm next man on the estate. I have just been seeing the lawyers."

"We're going different ways, Marbury."

"Stuff."

"I'm in the other camp," Peter insisted.

"Very well," said Marbury cheerfully; "when

you're tired of the other camp remember you've a friend outside. Good-bye, and good-luck."

Peter could not resist Marbury's good temper. He was beginning to feel in the wrong.

"Marbury," he said, "why am I always rude?"

Marbury smiled into Peter's lighted face:

"You were born younger than most of us. Meantime, your train is moving."

Peter scrambled into a passing carriage, and Marbury threw his luggage in at the window.

Peter waved him a friendly farewell, and retired to reflect upon his inveterate want of grace.

Marbury looked after the train in smiling meditation. He expected to see Peter within the year. He rather enjoyed the prospect of Peter loose among the intellectuals of London. He knew what these people were like.



## XIX

UNCLE HENRY was at first inclined to be angry when Peter appeared for the second time a banished man. Peter wisely forebore trying to explain the motive of his riot.

"The fact is, Uncle, I have had enough of Oxford," he said.

"Oxford seems to have had enough of you," his uncle grumbled. "I told you to get education."

"There isn't any education at Oxford. It's in London now."

"What will you do in London?"

"I could read for the bar," Peter suggested.

"Alone in London, eh? I don't think so. You want a nursemaid."

"Let the mater come and keep house."

Uncle Henry reflected. "Peter," he said, "keep out of the police court. I draw the line at that."

"I shall be all right in London. Oxford annoyed me, Uncle."

"Very well. I leave it to your mother."

Peter's mother agreed to come to London and manage a small flat.

"I shall just love to have you, mother," Peter said to her when the plans were laid.

"I wonder?" she said, searching his face.

"You're not worried about this Oxford mess?"

"I'm thinking, Peter. You're so terribly impatient."

Peter himself hunted out the flat and furnished it.

"Let him handle a bit of money," his uncle suggested.

Incidentally Peter learned something about the housing of people in London; something, too, of agents and speculators in housing. Finally he perched in Golder's Green in a small flat over a group of shops. The agent assured him it was a district loved by literary and artistic people.

His mother quickly followed him to London with plate and linen. A maid was engaged, and Peter settled down to happiness and comfort.

His first sensations were triumphant. He kicked his heels. The grey walls of Oxford fell away. He tramped the streets of London, and flung out the chest of a free man. Moreover, he had the zest of his new employment. He broke his young brains against the subtleties of the law.

Within a few weeks he began tentatively to know the intellectual firebrands of the time. He had sent his pamphlet concerning *Gingerbread Fair* to the distinguished author whose epistolary acquaintance he had made in Hamingburgh. The great man, who independently had heard the full story of Peter's assault upon the Lord Chamberlain's stage at Oxford, was tickled, and sent him

an introduction to a famous collectivist pair whose salon included everybody in London who had a theory and believed in it.

Peter met Georgian poets, independent critics and reviewers, mystics of every degree, diagrammatic and futurist painters, musicians who wrote in pentametric scales, social reformers, suspected dramatists — everybody who had proved anything, or destroyed anything, or knew how the world should be run; experts upon constitutional government in the Far East, upon beautiful conduct in garden cities, upon the incidence of taxation, upon housing and sanitation, upon sweated labour, upon sex and marriage, upon vaccination and physical culture, upon food-bases, oriental religion and Hindu poetry.

Peter did not meet all these people at once. There was a period of six months during which he gradually intruded among these jarring intelligencies. During this time he was continually seeing things from a new angle and weighing fresh opinions, continually pricked to explore untrodden ways of speculation. The chase of exotic views was for a time fun enough to keep him from measuring their value.

Peter for nearly eighteen months mingled with this fussy and bitter under-world of thinkers and talkers. He listened seriously to all it had to say, at first with respect and curiosity. But gradually he grew suspicious — even hostile. As he knew these people better, and talked with them more

intimately, he discovered that their energy was much of it superficial. When, in his lust for truth, he pushed into their defences, he found that many of their views were fashionable hearsay. They echoed one another. Only a few had deeply read or widely observed for themselves. Each clique had its registered commonplaces. Each was a nest of authority. Peter suffered a series of small shocks, hardly felt individually, but insensibly breaking down his faith. Often as he pushed into the mind of this person or that, thrilling to meet and clash with a pliable intelligence, he found himself vainly beating against the logical blank wall of a formula.

Among Peter's new acquaintances was the editor of a collectivist weekly Review. This man discovered Peter's literary gift and turned him loose upon the theatres. For several months Peter wrote weekly articles, with liberty to say what he pleased. Peter said what he pleased with ferocity. His articles were a weekly battery, trained upon the amusements of modern London. All went well till Peter began to quarrel with the intellectual drama of his editor. One week Peter grew bitter concerning a new stage hero of the time — the man of ideas who talks everybody down. Peter said flatly that he was tired of this figdety puppet. It was time he was put away. The editor sent for him.

“Here, Paragon, this won't do at all.”

“What's wrong?”

"You've dropped on this fellow like a sand-bag. We're here to encourage this sort of drama."

Peter put his nose into the air.

"What is the name of this paper? I thought you called it the *Free Lance*."

"You can say what you like about plays in general."

Peter then and there resigned. But he was too good a pen to lose. His editor borrowed a gallery ticket from a London daily paper, and sent Peter to attend debates in the House of Commons as an impartial critic of Parliamentary deportment and intelligence. Three weeks shattered all Peter's fixed ideas of English public life. He forgot to detest the futility of the party game — as he had at the Oxford Union so persistently contrived to do — in sincere enjoyment of a perpetually interesting comedy. Moreover, the figures he most admired were the figures he should by rote have denounced. He delighted in the perfect address of a statesman he had formerly reprobated as an old-fashioned Liberal; and, listening to the speeches of the old-fashioned Liberal's principal Tory opponent, he felt he was in contact with a living and adventurous mind. Peter recognised that this man — hitherto simply regarded as an enemy of the people — was, like himself, an explorer. He was feeling his way to the truth.

## XX

PETER stood one evening in early March — it was his second spring in London — upon the terrace at Westminster. The friendly member who had brought him there had for a moment disappeared. Perhaps it was the first stirring of the year, or the air blowing up from the sea after the fumes of the stuffiest room in London, but Peter felt a glad release as he watched the tide sweeping in from the bridge. He had just heard the speech of a socialist minister reflecting just that intellectual rigidity from which he was beginning to recoil. The day was warm, with faint ashes of a sunset dispersed over a sky of intense blue. Peter watched a boat steaming out into a world so wide that it dwarfed the towers under which he had that afternoon been sitting. Dead phrases lingered in his brain, prompting into memory a multitude of doctrines and ideas — the stuff on which he had fed since he set out to explore revolutionary London. He shot them impatiently at the open sky. They rattled against the impenetrable blue like peas flung at a window. Peter impulsively breathed deeply of the flowing air. It rushed into the corners of his brain.

He left the House, and walked towards Charing Cross. He fitfully turned over in his mind

passages of the speech he had heard that afternoon, but repeatedly the windy heavens rebuked him. He began to feel as if, with adventures all about him, he had for days been prying into a heap of rubbish.

He pulled up on the pavement beside a great horse straining to start a heavy dray. Sparks flew from his iron hoofs, which, in a desperate clatter, marked the rhythm of his effort. The muscles of his flank were contracted. His whole form was alive with energy. The dray started and moved away.

Elfinly there intruded upon Peter, watching the struggle of this beautiful creature, a memory of the ministerial orator. The one seemed grotesquely to outface the other. The straining thews of the horse were in tune with the sky. The breath in his nostrils was that same air from the sea which had met Peter upon the terrace. Nature was knit in a friendly vitality, mysteriously opposed to all the categories. The categories were somehow mystically shattered beneath the iron of the horse's beating hoofs; were shredded by the wind which noisily fluttered Peter's coat.

That same evening he attended a fashionable lecture, wherein it was explained that marriage was an affair of State. The theme touched in Peter a strain of feeling that had slept from the moment he had lost Miranda. When the lecturer had shown how the erotic forces now loose in the world, and acting blindly, could be successfully

run in leash by a committee of experts, Peter left the meeting and sat in a restaurant waiting for dinner. The place was gay with tongues. The tongues were German and French, or English that clearly was not natural; for this was a dining place of men who paid the bill for women they had not met before. The company was very select; and Peter, devouring an expensive meal, admired with the shyness that beauty still raised in him, the clothes, faces, and obvious charms of the lovely feeders. Sometimes his heart beat a little faster as the insolent, slow eyes of one of these women curiously surveyed him. There was a beautiful creature who especially fascinated him. He felt he would like just to look at her, and enjoy the play of her face. He could not do as he wished, because now and then she glanced at him, and he would not have met her eyes for the world. Once, however, there was a clashing of their looks, and Peter felt that his cheeks were burning.

Tumultuously rebuking his pulse, Peter caught an ironic vision of himself leading a long file of these brilliant women to the lecturer from whom he had just escaped, with a request that he should deal with them according to his theory of erotic forces.

May was drawing to an end when Peter's mother decided she must spend a few weeks with her brother in Hamingburgh. Peter realised, as she told him of this, how quietly necessary she had been to him during these last months. Always



he returned to the still, beautiful figure of his mother as to something rooted and safe. Sometimes, as he entertained some of his talking friends, he watched her sitting monumentally wise, passively confounding them.

"I won't stay alone in London," Peter suddenly announced.

His mother calmly considered him.

"I can easily arrange it for you," she suggested at last.

"I should go mad," said Peter briefly. He crossed to where his mother was sitting.

"Why, Peter," she said, "I hardly see anything of you."

"You are always there," said Peter, putting his arm around her shoulder. "You simply don't know what a comfort it is to have you. Somehow you keep things from going to the devil. I don't mean the housekeeping," continued Peter, answering his mother's puzzled look. "The fact is, mother, you're quite wonderful. You're the only person I know who hasn't any opinions. You just *are*."

Peter decided to go into the country, and return to London when his mother was ready to come back. The time for this had almost arrived, when he met Marbury in the lobby of the House of Commons.

Marbury broke away from his friends as Peter was hesitating whether to pass him.

"Hullo, Peter, what are you doing in this dusty

place? I thought you were loose in the theatre."

"Was," Peter briefly corrected.

"Then you got tired?"

"No, I squabbled with the editor."

"How are you getting on?" asked Marbury, quietly inspecting his friend.

"Very badly. How are you?"

"I'm standing in a month or so for the family seat," answered Marbury. "That's why I'm here. You must come and see the election. Politics from within."

"Damn politics."

"I'll tell you what it is, Peter. It's the Spring."

"I want to get away from all this infernal talking," said Peter.

"You've discovered that some of it's a bit thin?"

"I'll tell you what I've discovered," said Peter savagely, "I've discovered that almost any damn fool can be intellectual."

"Try the stupid fellows who are always right."

"Who are they?"

"Latest definition of a Tory. Come and talk to the farm-labourers."

"Not yet. I'm going to live in the air."

"What will you do? Books?"

"I hate books."

"Come now, Peter, not all books," protested Marbury. "Let me send you some. Books for the open."

"Can you find me a book that has nothing to

do with any modern thing — a book that goes with the earth and touches bottom.”

“What’s wrong with Shakespeare?” asked Marbury.

“I’ve packed Shakespeare.”

“I’ll send you some more.”

“Be careful,” Peter warned him; “I shall pitch anything that looks like a talking book into the fire.”

“You mustn’t do that, Peter. The books I am going to send you are valuable.”

They were walking now in Whitehall.

“When do you begin to be elected?” asked Peter, suddenly expanding.

“Almost at once. I’ll send for you when the time comes.”

“What’s the idea of that?”

“You must come round the constituency — fifty miles across in its narrowest part. I want someone to feed me with sandwiches and keep my spirits up. Besides it will do you good. You’ll meet some people who have never written a book and haven’t any opinions.”

“Beasts of the field,” said Peter.

“Not at all. They’re all on the register; and they will vote for Marbury.”

By the time they had reached Charing Cross Marbury had persuaded Peter to tell his address. He also agreed to join Marbury immediately he was summoned. The next day he went with his mother to Hamingburgh, and afterwards packed

for the country. He would wander aimlessly in Worcestershire from village to village till Marbury sent for him.

Already he was happier for the meeting. He felt an access of real affection for Marbury on being interrupted in his packing by the arrival of the books Marbury had promised. He pitched them unopened into his trunk, in confidence that Marbury had chosen well.

## XXI

PETER finally quartered himself upon a lonely farm in Worcestershire. The estate was large and wild, running down steep hills and banks to a brook and tiny falls of water. The family who owned it scraped a livelihood from odds and ends of country employment. They had some orchard, and pasture for half a dozen cows. But there was no arable, and they made up a yearly deficit by receiving visitors from the town.

Peter had the place to himself, and the peace of it was deeply refreshing. The house stood high, whence the shapely hills of the country were visible — Malvern hanging like a small cloud on the horizon. For many days he lay in the June sun, listening to the stir of leaves, watching with curiosity the lives of small creatures he could not name. In deepest luxury he sat day by day on a fallen trunk across the stream, grateful after the blazing descent of a broken hill for the cool shade of trees meeting overhead, watching a fish lying under the bank or rising to snap at a fly. Or he would be buried in grass, softly topped by the light wind, diverted after long, empty moments by the appearance of a rabbit or a bird not suspecting him. Peter dreamed away whole days, utterly vacant of thought, recording things. He counted

the number of times a glossy black cow, munching beside him, masticated her food between each return of the cud. There was a horse which had brought his trunk to the house who always stood with his head thrust through a gap in the hedge. Peter watched the flies collect upon his eyelids, and waited lazily for the blink which regularly dispersed them in a tiny cloud. Peter, in reaction from the fruitless activity of his last months in London, rested and was pleased. It seemed as he lay upon the earth that the scent of the grass was life enough; that reality, humming in wings of the air, in the splashing of water, in noises of the cattle, was sufficient for his uninquiring day. He took an enormous pleasure in small material things — the spiriting of warm milk into the pail; the breath of an old dog as he stood, watchful and erect, in the cold morning; the slow, graceful sweeping of a scythe; the shining of the first star after sunset; the dipping of hot fingers into the brook; the odour of ham frizzling in the farmer's pan.

At night, with the curtains drawn, and by the light of an oil lamp whose smell was ever after associated in Peter's mind with these rustic days, he played with the books which Marbury had packed for him. Among them was Burton's *Arabian Nights* and Urquhart's *Rabelais*. Marbury had well chosen. Peter had never felt before the wonder of *Rabelais*. Here, alone with the beasts and with people whose lives were taken

up with their feeding and breeding, Peter smelt in *Rabelais* the fresh dirt and sweat of the earth. He squarely received between his shoulders the hearty slap of a laughter broad as mankind. *Rabelais* was the evening chorus of his day in the fields. The voices of the hearty morning, the slow noon, and the quiet evening sounded between the lines where Grangousier warmed his great bulk by the fire and Gargantua thrived to enormous manhood.

It was only after many days that Peter looked into Burton. He wondered why Marbury should have included a book he knew only as a series of pretty tales. Then he found that beside his *Rabelais* upon the shelf was the greatest song of the flesh yet uttered.

After his first night with Burton, Peter flung wide his window to the air. A cat slunk cautiously into the garden and away. The farmer and his wife came out for a moment to read the sky, and stood in the light of the door. The old man lifted his face, and was moulded clearly in silhouette — a face beaten hard with weather, but untroubled after seventy years of appetites healthily satisfied. He was sagacious as befitted his high species; he had eaten and drunk for sixty-five years, and had bred of his kind. All this he had inevitably done as a creature with his spade in the earth and his hand heavy upon the inferior beasts.

Mere flesh and blood was good, and it endured.

Peter's heart was pulsing now with a song older than an English farmer — a song of man who was tickled under an Eastern sun and laughed, who was pricked with absolute lust — who found his flesh not an obstacle between himself and heaven, but his heritage and expression.

Peter was not thinking. He idly looked and received a faint rain of impressions from the still night and from memories of a tale. A barrier of fresh earth mounted between him and his troubles of the year. He was content to rest and dream. He turned from the window, weary with air and sun, stretching his elbows in an agreeable yawn. He felt the clean flexion of the muscles of his arm. He stretched again, repeating a healthy pleasure, and yawned happily to bed.

Haymaking under a burning sun began on the following day, and Peter offered help to the farmer. The old man looked favourably at Peter's broad shoulders and friendly eyes. Then there were long back-breaking hours in the open field. Peter learned why there was leisure and grace in the movements of his companion, and tried to imitate, under pleasant chaff, the expert's artful economy of power.

Peter soon found in his new friend a surprising fund of wisdom painfully gathered. The farmer's knowledge was limited, but very sure. He had learned life for himself, with scraps inherited from his father and collected from his friends. His prejudices, even when absurd, were rooted in



the earth. Peter felt he would exchange all his books for a blank mind where Nature could write in so firm a hand.

His wife brought cider and cheese to them in the field, and they sat under a hedge contemplating the morning's work in the pauses of a rough meal.

"Plenty to do yet," said Peter, looking at the large field with a sense of labour to come.

"Matter o' twenty-four hours."

The old man paused on the rim of his mug, and narrowed his eyes at the blue sky. "We can be gentle with the work. You'll find it pays to be gentle."

Peter drank gratefully at the cool cider.

"Thirsty, sir?" The old man filled Peter's mug and watched him drink it.

"That's good liquor. Forty years she's brewed it." He jerked his thumb towards the house.

"Your wife?" asked Peter most politely.

"Married forty years," nodded the old man. "It's well to marry when you're lusty. Nature's kind when you live natural, but, if you thwart her, she turns you a beast in the end. Married yourself?" he suddenly asked, surveying Peter as a likely young animal.

"I'm only twenty-one," said Peter, with a shocked inflexion.

"Not too young for marriage," grossly chuckled the old man. "There's many uneasy lads of your age and less would do well to be married. The devil tickles finely the members of a young lad."

Peter had heard these things discussed in a public hall, but the language had been decently scientific or medical. How vulgar and timid seemed these late evasions under the burning sun! Peter was ashamed not to be able frankly to meet an old man who talked clearly of nature without picking his words.

Peter sweated through the day, and in the evening sat happily tired at the window. His day's work had brought him nearer yet to the earth. The faint smell of the drying grass, and a dim line of the field where the green blade met the grey, was witness of a day well spent. Manual labour was delightful after lounging weeks of mental work with nothing to show. There was something ultimate and real about physical expenditure. Could anything in the world be finer than to be just a very sagacious animal?

A low, gurgling song — it seemed the voice of a woman — came and went among the trees of the garden. Then there was silence. Soon there were footsteps, and two figures appeared in the shadow of some bushes beside the gate which gave upon the lawn beneath him. The figures stood close, and a man's voice, pleading, alternated with low laughter in the tone which previously had been the tone of the song. At last the man moved forward, and the woman, still laughing, allowed herself to be kissed. As Peter drew instinctively back he heard her laughter muted by the man's

lips. The incident stirred Peter more than he cared to acknowledge. He heard his heart beating, and saw his hand tremble on the sill.

He angrily shut the window, and, lighting the lamps, took down his books from the shelf. But the books would not hold his brain. The stifled laugh of the woman by the gate echoed there. He caught himself staring at the page, restless, feeling that the room oppressed him. It seemed that life was beating at the window, that the room in which he sat was unvisited, and that he was holding the visitor at bay.

He gave up all pretence of reading, and again let in the air. He stared into the garden, which now seemed the heart of the world. The figures by the gate had vanished, but Peter fancied he heard, from the dark, whiffs of talk, and breathing movements.

At last there were steps unmistakable, and the same low song Peter had first heard. This time the woman was alone. She carried a hat in her hand. She stood by the gate a moment, and pushed the pins into her hair. Then she came over the lawn into the light of the house window, walking free and lithe. She paused at the window and looked mischievously in upon the old couple below. Clearly she had come to surprise them. She opened the door upon them in a gleam of sly excitement. Peter saw with a renewed beating of the heart how full were the smiling lips he had

heard stifled into silence. His mind threw back the girl, as she stood in the light, into the shadow of a man's embrace.

A clamour of greeting from below scattered his thoughts.

"Why, if it isn't Bess!" he heard the old man say. Then there was a hearty kissing, and the door was shut on a murmur of welcoming talk.

Peter lay long into the night, listening to the clatter of tongues over a meal below. Bess was clearly a favourite. When the kitchen door opened, and the family tramped to bed, he heard once more the low vibrating voice of the girl.

"Good night, grandpa!"

Then he heard the women above him in the attic, making up a bed. One of them came down, and the house dropped into silence save for the quiet movements of the girl upstairs.

## XXII

PETER in the morning was early awake. He had asked the day before, as a fledged labourer, to take his breakfast with the farmer that they might begin early with the hay. He felt shy of the girl whose appearance had so disconcerted him the night before. But there was no one in the kitchen except the old man and his wife.

"You heard us in the night, I reckon?" said the old man over his mug of tea.

"You had a visitor?"

"My son's first daughter. Come to lend a hand with the work. She's strong in the field — strong as a good man. You'll make a good pair," chuckled the old man. "We'll finish the ten acre to-day."

"I'll have the start, anyway," said Peter, affectedly covering his tremors. He did not relish the idea of being second labourer to a girl who already had made him nervous.

The old man laughed in the unending way of people who enjoy one joke a day, but enjoy it well.

"You'll not get the start o' Bess," he said at last. "She's milked this half-hour, and she'll a' dug taters for a week 'fore we're sweated."

They left the house and worked silently through the first half of the morning. Peter was silent,

preoccupied with his strange terror of meeting the farmer's granddaughter. Yet, as they rested at noon, he was disappointed that she had not come. He had not found content in his labour.

Then, suddenly, he saw her coming over the field with a tray. At once he felt a panic to run or to disappear. He could feel his flesh burning beneath the sweat of his morning's work. He could not look directly at the girl, but in swift glances he embraced the swing and poise of her advance.

For a miserable moment Peter stood between his terror of the girl and his instinct to run and relieve her of the heavy tray. He felt himself — it seemed after hours of indecision that he did so — spring to his feet. He met her ten yards from the spot where they had sheltered under the hedge.

"Let me," he said, taking the tray into his hands. He did not look at her, but knew she was smiling at his strange, polite way.

"The young gentleman's in a mighty hurry to know you, Bess," said the farmer, amused at Peter's incredibly gallant behaviour.

"He's a young gentleman, to be sure," said the girl in the low, even note which again stirred Peter to the bone. He felt her eyes surveying him, and in an agony of resolution looked her in the face.

He could only endure for a moment her steady, impudent gaze. Her lazy smile accented the challenge of her eyes. Peter was conscious only of her sex, and she knew it at their first meeting. In

every look and motion of her face and body was provocation. Her appeal was not always conscious, but it was never silent. Peter saw now what had moved him as she stood in the light of the window the evening before with mischief in her eyes. Even then, though she had no thought of a lover, it was woman's mischief. He saw it now fronting him in the sun. He could hardly endure to meet it, yet it was vital and sweet.

They sat and talked of the work before them.

"You've come in good time, Bess. 'Twill be a storm before the week ends, and we must get the ten acre carried."

She sat calmly munching bread and cheese, waiting to catch Peter in one of his stealthy glances.

"Yes, grandpa, I've come in good time. Perhaps I knew you had a handsome young labourer."

How could she play among the messages that quickened in their eyes?

Peter angrily flushed, and she laughed. The old man chuckled, seeing nothing at all. He was not a part of their quick life.

The old man scythed steadily through the afternoon. Peter and the girl tossed the long ranks of hay, working alternate rows. He was never for a moment unaware of her presence. Starting from the extreme ends of the field, they regularly met in the centre. As the distance between them vanished, Peter became painfully excited, almost terrified. Though he seldom looked towards the

girl, he somehow followed every swing of her brown arms. She invariably stopped her work as he approached, and Peter felt like a young animal whose points are numbered in the ring. He passed her three times, doggedly refusing to notice her. At the fourth encounter he shot at her a shyly resentful — almost sullen — protest. But the eyes he encountered were fixed on the strong muscles of his neck with a look — almost of greed — which staggered him. She knew he had read her, and she laughed as, in a tumult of pleasure, stung with shame, he turned swiftly away.

“Good boy,” she murmured under her breath. Peter angrily turned towards her, and found her eyes, lit with mockery, openly seducing him.

“What do you mean?” said Peter foolishly.

“You’re working fine, but you’re not used to it.”

“I’m all right.”

“You’re dripping with heat.” She dropped her fork, and caught at her apron. It was a pretty apron, decorated with cherry-coloured ribbons.

“Come here,” she said.

Peter stared at her like a fascinated rabbit. She stepped towards him, and wiped the running sweat from his face and neck. He pettishly shook himself free. Laughing, she stood back and admired him. Then, with a little shrug, she turned away and went slowly down the field. Peter watched her for a moment, troubled but hopelessly caught in the ease and grace of her swinging arms.



Her face, as she came to him, had seemed as delicately cool as when first she appeared from the house, though a fine dew had glistened in the curves of her throat. She was lovely and strong; yet Peter had for her a faint, persistent horror.

He felt when evening came, and the field was mown, a glad release, curiously dashed with regret. His room had about it the atmosphere of a sanctuary. He was grateful for the peace it held, yet it was also desolate. After supper he sat at the window, watching the hills fade into a violet sky. As the light softened he heard once again a low song from the orchard. Peter's heart started like a spurred horse. The song continued — the faint crooning, as it were, of a thoughtful bird — and at last it became intolerable. Peter shut down his window and opened a book upon the table near him. It was a volume of Burton left from last evening. It fell open easily at a page; and, as Peter lifted it in the dim light, he read the title of a frank and merry tale concerning the way of a woman with a boy less willing than she. Peter suddenly dashed down the book as though he had been stung. Flouting his eyes between the leaves of this tale was a fragment of cherry-coloured ribbon.

He went from the house into the warm air, and flung himself down on the cut grass. He felt as if he were being hunted. In vain he avoided the image of the girl who had challenged him. He shut his eyes, and she again stood clearly

before him in the hot sun. He buried his ears in the cool grass, and he heard her low singing. Then, in a sudden surrender, he suppressed his shy terror, and in fancy looked at her as in the flesh he had not dared to look, tracing between himself and the sky the outline of her lips and throat.

How sultry it was, and still! The air was waiting oppressively for a storm. Peter felt himself in tune with the hanging thunder. He felt he would like to hear the running water of the brook. The pearly wreck of a sunset lighted him down the hill, and soon he was sitting in a chosen nook of the river, his ears refreshed by small noises of the stream.

The silence was deep, for there was not a breath in the valley. The trees seemed to be mildly brooding — sentient sad creatures waiting for the air. Once Peter heard the bracken stir; but the silence closed again over the faint sound, leaving the world waiting as for a signal.

It seemed as if Nature was standing there bidding the earth be still till the creature she had vowed to subdue was beaten down. Peter flung his thoughts to the blank silence of the place, and they returned, reverberating and enforced.

Suddenly a shot shivered the silence into quick echoes. Peter guessed the farmer was in the warren after rabbits. Thinking to meet him and get away from the intolerable obsession of the day, he started to climb the hill. The second shot rang out surprisingly near, and almost immediately a

figure rose from a bush among the bracken. It was the farmer's granddaughter. He cried out in surprise, and the figure turned.

She greeted him with an inquiring lilt of the voice. Peter came awkwardly forward.

"Did you hit?" he asked, for talking's sake.

"Two."

She leaned on the gate, hatefully smiling at him. Peter felt he must turn and run from her eyes, or that he must answer them.

He moved quickly towards her, but she did not stir. He gripped her by the arm, looked deliberately into her face, then bent and kissed her. She remained quite still, seeming merely to wait and to suffer. She neither retreated nor responded. Passion died utterly in Peter at the touch of her smiling lips. He stood away from her, brutal and chill.

"You asked me to do that," he said.

Still she smiled, betraying no sign that anything had occurred.

"You must help me to find the rabbits," she said, looking away at last towards the warren. "We're losing the light."

There was a suspicion of the fine lady in her manner, assumed to deride him. They hunted among the bracken. Peter found the dead rabbits, and they moved silently up the hill. At the garden gate they paused while he handed over his burden. Her face still kept the maddening expression of the moment when he had kissed her. But Peter's

eyes now blazed back at her in wrath, and her look changed to one of slyly affected terror.

"Are you going to kiss me again?" she asked.

"Not here," Peter roughly answered. "This is where you sing. I saw you here yesterday evening."

A look of angry suspicion flashed into her eyes and passed.

"Men are very rude and sudden," she said.

"Why do you sing in the dark?"

"I sing for company," she answered.

She passed through the gate; then turned, for a moment, hesitating:

"You don't tell tales?" she abruptly asked.

"No."

"The man you saw last night," she suggested.

"I did not see him."

"He will not come again. Not yet."

"It is nothing to me," said Peter indifferently.

"Indeed?" she retorted. "I thought you asked why I sing in the dark."

Peter kept his eyes sullenly fixed on the ground, making no answer.

She shut the gate.

"Do you really want to know why I sing in the dark?"

Peter's silence covered a wish to kill this creature. There was a long silence; and when at last he looked up, her eyes were again mischievously playing him. On meeting his look of resentment and dislike, she inconsequently asked:

“Have you found a piece of cherry-coloured ribbon?”

Peter flung up his hands, and turned away into the garden. She had no need to see that he was cursing her in the shelter of the trees. She went towards the house crooning the song which was now intolerable to Peter.

## XXIII

IT was arranged next morning at breakfast that Peter should work in the field with the farmer, and that his granddaughter should clear the remains of last year's crop of hay from the site of the stack into the loft. Peter was grateful for this division of their work; yet, again, he was strangely disappointed. Halfway through the morning, when he had done all he could for the farmer, he sat miserably in the shadow of the hedge, fighting a blind impulse to look for the girl whose presence he detested. Surely the hot sun was burning into his brain. He went towards the house, meeting on his way the farmer's wife.

"I wonder if you'd tell Bess there's lunch waiting to be taken. I daren't leave the butter this half-hour."

"Where shall I find her?" Peter asked.

"She's in the loft, to be sure."

Peter went slowly to the yard. He seemed to be two men — one lured by the echo of a song, the other hanging upon his feet, unwilling that he should move.

The last of the stack had disappeared into the loft, wisps of hay lying in a trail from the foot of the ladder. The yard was empty.

Peter paused at the ladder's foot. Then began slowly to climb.

She was resting in a far corner, and he did not see her till he had stepped from the ladder. Then he found himself looking down at her stretched at length upon piles of sweet hay. She had fallen asleep easily as a cat, and, unconscious of her pose, was freely beautiful. Her loveliness caught at Peter. Could she but lie asleep for ever, he could for ever watch. Sleep had smoothed from her features the impudent knowledge of her power. Her beauty now lay softly upon her, held in the pure curves of her throat.

Peter leaned breathlessly towards her, filling his eyes. Had he really feared this magic? Such loveliness as this his soul had caught at in scattered dreams, and now it fronted him, and he had feared to take it. Surely he had fancied that the smile of her perfect mouth was hateful, that her eyes, so beautifully lidded, had in their pride and gluttony dismayed him.

Peter dropped softly beside her. She seemed too like a fairy to be rudely touched. He delicately brushed her lips in a kiss scarcely to be felt. She started and sat upright, alert in every fibre.

Peter saw again the creature who had troubled him. He was looking into greedy pools where her lids had seemed as curtains to hide an intolerable purity.

“ You kissed me ? ”

“ It was not you,” Peter muttered.

“ Funny boy! How long have you been here ? ”

"I have come to say that lunch is waiting."

"Peter." She sang the name in her low voice, as though she were trying the sound of it.

"You kissed me, Peter. Tell me. How do I look, asleep?"

Peter closed his eyes.

"You are beautiful."

"Even you can see that," she flashed.

Peter felt she was profaning her loveliness. He kept his eyes painfully closed. She looked at him, partly in anger, partly in contempt.

"Good boy. So very good," she murmured.

As he opened his eyes, she dropped lightly towards him. In a flash she had taken his neck between her hands, and he felt her lips and teeth upon the muscles of his neck, where her eyes had rested when first he had read them.

Then she nestled there with a little purr.

Peter broke roughly away, and she laughed.

"Good boy." She mocked him again from the ladder as she went down.

Peter waited with clenched hands till the trembling of the ladder had ceased. Then he looked into the yard. She had not yet disappeared. A young farmer had ridden into the drive, and was talking to her from his horse. She seemed to be deprecating his anger. They paused in their talk as Peter drew near them. The man was good-looking, with honest eyes. But he looked at Peter with angry suspicion, carefully



searching his face, as though he desired to remember him if they should meet again.

That afternoon Peter left the farm and walked into the country. Thunder echoed among the hills, seeming the voice of his trouble. He was humiliated by the lure of a woman he disliked and feared. He vehemently told himself that he would break away. But he continually felt the strong tug of her sex. He shook under the pressure of her mouth, his neck yet bitten with that strange caress. He shunned the memory, yet returned to it, thrilling with an excitement, sweet even as it stung him.

The thunder waited among the hills all that day. As the evening wore, and Peter, back at the farm, watched the summer lightning come and go, it seemed as though batteries were closing in from all points of the heaven. But the sky was still open to the stars, and there was no rain.

Peter stood with the farmer by the garden gate. He told Peter that the little hill where they united was mysteriously immune, in a tempest, from the water which deluged the valley.

As Peter, with his thoughts full of the farmer's granddaughter, listened to the farmer's tale of a dry storm which, with never a spot of rain, had fired the stack in the yard, it seemed as though, now and then, he could hear her low singing. It floated on the heavy air. Peter could scarcely tell whether it were really her voice or an echo in

his tired brain. He strained his ears, between the pauses of the farmer's talk. The low note swelled and died.

The farmer moved into the house, and Peter could more connectedly listen. Now he heard it clearly, a faint persistent singing, implacably fascinating. To find that voice was above all things to be desired.

Peter listened, faint at heart with a struggle which suddenly seemed foolish. Pleasure caught at him. He saw her beautiful, as when she slept, the low notes of her voice breathed from lips that were neither mocking nor cruel. Her hands again crept upon his throat, and he did not draw away. He needed them.

Where should he find her? Peter went like a young animal, tracking through the dark. He paused, quietly alert; as he discovered that her murmuring came from the loft where he had found her sleeping. He climbed the ladder, and stepped into the darkness. The singing stopped, and he stood still while his eyes measured the place. At last he saw her almost at his feet. He dropped beside her without a word. She did not stir, but said as softly as though she feared to frighten him away:

“So you have come to me?”

Her voice was very gentle. It was the voice of the woman who had slept.

Peter could descry her now, half sitting against

the hay. He perceived only the curve of her face and neck beautifully poised above him, for he had fallen at her feet.

"I cannot see you," she said. "Are you still afraid and angry?"

She stooped over him, trying to read his face. She was very quiet. Her voice parted the still air as placidly as a dropped stone makes eddies in the water.

It seemed to offer him an endless comfort.

"I had to come to you," he whispered.

She gathered him into her arms, and kissed him as softly as he had kissed her sleeping. Peter felt as though he were sinking. As she drew her cool hands across his forehead and took his face between them, he found her tender and compelling, and he leaned upon her bosom with the waters of pleasure closing above him.

But the girl had played too long with her passion. She had met him delicately, deliberately holding back her greed, enjoying the tumult in herself and the coming delight of throwing the barriers down. She bent to kiss Peter a second time, and Peter waited for the caress of her song made visible. But, even as she stooped, there came into her eyes a lust which the darkness covered.

Suddenly the veil was torn. A vivid flash of lightning lit her, and flickered away, snatched from cloud to cloud above them. For an instant Peter

saw her eyes as she stooped to him. Then darkness blotted her out, and her mouth closed down upon him.

He struggled in her arms. She did not measure the strength of his revolt, but held him fast.

“Kiss me, Peter.”

The words were hot upon his cheek.

Peter put forth his whole strength, and she staggered away from him. There was a short silence. She had fallen back from the excess of his recoil. He saw her dimly rise from among the hay.

“You beast!”

The words hissed at him in the dark. Venomous anger was in her tone, and bitter contempt.

There was a silence in which their pulses could be heard. Then she spoke again.

“Why did you come to me?”

Peter could not answer. His soul was a battlefield between forces stronger than himself. She walked to the door, and Peter stared vacantly at her going. The next moment he was alone.

“Why did you come to me?”

The question beat at Peter's brain all through the dreadful night. Scarcely had he got back to his room than the storm burst from the four quarters with incredible light and clamour. But Peter's ears were deaf and his eyes were blind. He sat at his window, but heard neither the rain rushing in the valley below, nor the intolerable

din in the sky above him where still the stars were clear.

Had he acted the green fool, or was he proved of a finer clay than he had allowed? He had drifted towards this girl to take her, obeying the blind motion of his blood. Then fiercely his whole being had revolted. He could not do this thing. Was his refusal a base fear of life? Had he denied his youth and the power of passion? He could not measure his deed. He now saw something fine, something consistent and strong in the girl he had refused. His own share of the story seemed only contemptible. It was even absurd. He had ineffectually played with forces beyond him.

Had he really thwarted and denied his nature? He asked it again and again. He had wanted the girl. He wanted her yet. But he could not take her with his whole soul. Therefore he could not take her at all. What was the meaning of this ugly riddle? Why was he monstrously drawn to a thing he could not do?

He denied with his whole soul that he lacked passion — the gift without which man is a creeping thing. His passion even now outplayed the lightning which forked and ran and fired the trees in the valley.

Thus Peter went wearily round his conduct of the last few hours, without advancing. Late in the night he packed to leave in the morning, and

afterwards tried to sleep. But his tired brain trod the old circle of his thoughts — catching at his sleep with pale gleams of speculation, calling him into momentary consciousness, suffering him only briefly to forget.

In the morning he was flushed and uncertain. He shivered from time to time, though the storm had not lifted the summer heat. He had never felt so tired, and so utterly without strength or comfort.

## XXIV

PETER, finding the farmer and his wife at breakfast, told them he was leaving, and asked that his luggage should be taken to the station. The station was two miles from the house, and Peter started to walk. He had turned into the drive, and was passing the last of the farm buildings, when he ran upon two figures vehemently talking. Their voices troubled his miserable brooding; but he was hardly yet aware of their presence before his way was barred. He looked up from the ground and was confronted with a man visibly blazing with anger.

He looked aside for an explanation, and saw that the man had been talking with the farmer's granddaughter. She was watching them with expressionless eyes, but with a cold satisfaction hiding in the line of her mouth.

"What does this mean?" said Peter, making an attempt to pass.

He looked swiftly from one to the other, recognising his opponent as the man he had seen talking from his horse in the yard yesterday.

The man struck at Peter with his whip.

Peter caught the blow on his arm, and flung out his fists.

"What's your quarrel with me?" asked Peter.

"Well you know it," said the man.

Peter turned to the farmer's granddaughter. She smiled at him, and he understood. He was filled with a desolating sense of the futility of resisting the event.

"I've no quarrel with you," he drearily protested to the man, "why do you force it?"

"It's late to talk of forcing."

"Forcing? I don't understand."

Again Peter turned to the woman. Her metallic outfacing of his question flashed the truth at him.

"He knows that you have insulted me."

The words came from her on a low malicious note. —

"Are you going to fight?" the man blazed at him, flinging his weapon to the ground. "Or are you going to take that?" He pointed to the whip lying between them.

Peter flung off his coat. Standing in the sun, he felt weak and vague. He swayed a little. He felt he must get away from the intolerable heat. He looked into the shed beside them, and the man nodded.

They went in and faced each other upon a dusty floor of uneven stone. The girl sat on Peter's coat, indecently fascinated. The man looked grimly at Peter's strong arms and professional attitude. But Peter was faint and sick. He saw his fists before him as though they belonged to another — white and blurred. Dreamily he realised that a blow had started upon him out of the



grey air. He met it with an instinctive guard; but he weakly smiled to feel something heavy and strong break through his arm like paper. Then everything was blotted out.

In a moment the man was kneeling beside him, astonished at the strange collapse of his opponent. Peter had gone down like a sack, striking his head on the stone floor. The man had hardly touched him. Indeed, he had himself nearly fallen with the impetus of a blow which had fallen upon the air.

He felt Peter's pulse and forehead, awed by his stillness and the stare of his eyes. The girl was now beside him.

"Quick," she said. "Run to the house. We must get him to bed."

The man looked at her, hard and stern.

"You're a bit too anxious," he said.

"Can't you see? The boy's dying."

He looked implacably into her eyes.

"Let the blackguard lie."

"Fool!"

She almost spat at him, with a gesture of impatient agony for Peter on the floor.

"You've been lying to me," suddenly said the man.

She did not answer, but he persisted:

"You told me ——"

"He did not."

He lifted his hand to strike her. She did not flinch, but said quietly:

“Who’s the blackguard now?”

He turned and walked swiftly from the shed. She heard him running to the house, and took Peter’s head on her lap. His lips were moving. Compassion stirred in her — a sensual compassion, feeding upon her complete possession of Peter, helplessly at her pleasure.

The man returned with the farmer’s cart, and Peter was taken to the house. A telegram was sent to Hamingburgh, and the local doctor was called. He said that Peter had had a stroke of the sun. He was in a raging fever. The farmer’s granddaughter was occasionally left with him.

She sat for several hours beside the bed watching Peter’s restless and feeble movements. Sometimes she heard him talking vaguely and softly, but for long she could catch no syllable of what he said. Again she was stirred with delicious pity. She put her hands upon his cheeks, and leaned over his stirring lips for a long hour. Then suddenly she began to hear what he was saying, piecing his broken words.

He was walking alone in a dark house. It was very dark and quite still except for the dripping of water into a cistern. Peter always returned to this dripping water. He was looking for someone, and he stood where she used to sleep. At last a strange name came to his tongue — endlessly repeated.

The listening girl drew away from him. She

went to the window to get beyond range of his voice. She was empty and thwarted. The name pursued her and she turned back to the bed. Maddened by his repeated murmur, she felt as if she were fighting for a place in his mind. She put her hand upon his mouth, trying to still the name upon his lips. But she felt them moving under the touch of her fingers, with the syllables that shut her out.

She dropped on her knees beside him, becoming a part of his madness.

"Here is the woman you want," she sang to him. Tears of vexation and jealousy — quick as a child's — started down her face.

"Peter, boy, don't you remember? You came to me, and dropped in the hay. I sang to you in the dark, and you came."

But Peter stood in a dark house, muttering a name she had never heard. Now he was striking matches one after another, peering into the empty corners of a deserted room. Then he spoke of an attic with rafters, and again of the dripping water.

The girl looked into his vacant eyes.

"Can't you see me, Peter?"

It was someone else he saw: he talked now of her dusty frock and of a garden where he sat and waited.

The woman by the bed could not come between him and this lovely ghost. She strained Peter towards her, and put her face to his cheek.

“No, Peter; it’s me that is here. Can’t you feel that I am holding you?”

Her pressure started in him another disordered memory. He struggled against her, and raised himself upon an elbow. His eyes looked quite through her. He saw her in his brain, but he did not see her in the room before him. The girl shuddered to hear him struggling with a mirage of herself. He was back in the loft. At first she thought it was the sight of her visibly before him in the room that caused him to speak of her. She drew back, and with a shudder saw he was talking to the air.

“You are not Miranda,” he said, accusing the shape of his brain. “She smiled, but she did not smile like that.”

The girl could no longer endure it. She went from the room, and, till Mrs. Paragon came, the farmer’s wife sat beside him.

## XXV

MRS. PARAGON arrived late in the afternoon. Peter could not be made to perceive her, and a physician was sent for from London.

Mrs. Paragon sat with Peter through the night, stifling her fear. His talk perplexed her in the extreme. The empty house where he wandered became as real to her as the room in which she sat. He had gone there to find Miranda, and this it was that so grieved and puzzled his mother. Peter had never once spoken of Miranda since the night he had arranged to go to London for the first time. She did not think he had of late thought of Miranda. Had he been eating his heart in secret?

The farmer's granddaughter waited upon Mrs. Paragon through the night. They talked only of his condition, but Mrs. Paragon noted her extreme interest in the patient.

Towards the morning they were together by the bedside. Peter had begun again to talk, and Mrs. Paragon suddenly saw the girl shrink away. Then almost immediately she turned and left the room.

Mrs. Paragon bent to listen. Peter was treading again the weary round of his thoughts of the

preceding day. After a few moments his mother's face became very thoughtful.

When in the morning the girl brought her some breakfast, she said to her quietly:

"How long have you been here?"

"Two days." Already the girl knew she was detected.

"What has happened to my son?"

"How am I to know better than the doctor?" she countered.

"You know very well indeed."

"He is nothing to me."

Mrs. Paragon inexorably faced her:

"How could you be so wicked?" she said in a low voice.

"What do you mean?"

"You are not surprised when I talk to you of my son, and you have been here only two days."

Peter's mother stood like marble. The girl saw she was open to be read. Her pride was broken.

"Do not send me away," she pleaded. "I must know whether he lives or dies."

"What right have you to know?"

The girl was silent, and Mrs. Paragon shivered. She hardly dared be made sure.

"Has my son belonged to you?"

"No."

The girl hated to confess it, but quickly used it as a plea:

"Now will you let me stay?" she entreated.

Mrs. Paragon turned coldly away.

"Please go," she commanded.

The girl was struck into a hopeless humility.

"I will not trouble him again," she pleaded.

"I myself shall see to that."

Mrs. Paragon spoke calmly, and did not stir. Peter lay on the bed safely in her shadow.

The girl looked her farewell at him and passed out.

The specialist from London arrived before noon. He at once took a cheerful view. After listening to the local doctor's account of Peter's night, and examining the patient himself, he relieved Mrs. Paragon of her fears.

"What's the boy been doing?" he asked, after deciding there was nothing to keep him in Worcestershire. "This might well be mistaken for a touch of the sun," he said, smiling at the local man, "but it's not quite so simple. It looks as if he'd been trying to put himself straight with things, and not quite succeeded. He's suffering from acute mental excitement, but he's a healthy youngster and his temperature's falling. He won't talk any more."

"There's a thing that rather puzzles me, doctor," Mrs. Paragon hesitated.

"Well?"

"My son has been troubled, greatly troubled, by someone here, but most of his talk was about someone else."

"I don't quite understand."

"He has talked of a girl I thought he had

forgotten. At least I did not think she had lately been in his mind."

"Very likely not, Mrs. Paragon. The mind's not at all a simple thing. Usually in cases like this the memories which come uppermost are things forgotten. We call it the subconscious self. This girl your son has been talking about — probably he does not know that he remembers her. Perhaps — of course I don't know all the circumstances — he has not thought of her for years. But evidently she is a vital memory. She is sleeping in his mind. Pardon my running on like this," the doctor concluded, smiling, "but you look interested."

"I think I understand."

"Is that all you want to know?"

"You are sure he is quite safe?"

"There's nothing to be anxious about. He only wants well nursing."

The doctor paused and looked keenly at Mrs. Paragon.

"You are very proud of him," he suggested.

"Prouder to-day than ever."

"He looks quite a splendid fellow. Send for me if anything goes seriously wrong."

Mrs. Paragon now sat happily with Peter, for he grew continually calmer, and she felt he was safe. A proud content sank deep into her heart as she put together the story of these last days. She pondered also the doctor's words, and wondered whether Peter had consciously called



Miranda to his help. Or did she lurk as a secret angel under the surface of his life?

Forty-eight hours later Peter woke from a long sleep, and found his mother beside him. He did not stir, but just accepted her. He felt too weak to talk, and, taking some food, went immediately to sleep again.

Next time he woke Mrs. Paragon was not in the room, the farmer's wife having taken charge for a moment. Peter raised himself on one elbow, wondering to feel himself so weak.

"How long have I been like this?" he asked. "I feel as if I'd been in bed for a year."

"You're all right now, lad. You've been too much in the hot sun and got a touch o' fever."

Peter looked round the room.

"Didn't I see my mother here?" he asked.

"You did, to be sure. We sent for her when you were took with the heat. It was Bess that found you, lying in the road."

Peter remembered now how and where he had fallen.

Mrs. Paragon came in at that moment, and the farmer's wife greeted her.

"The lad's awake, and talking like a Christian."

Mrs. Paragon came and kissed him, the farmer's wife softly leaving them together. Peter looked tranquilly at his mother.

"I'm afraid I've frightened you," he said at last.

"Only for a little while," she reassured him.

"What time is it? I mean, how long have you been here?"

"Only three days."

"It feels like a hundred years," said Peter. "As if it had all happened to someone else. There was a girl here, mother. Where is she now?"

"She has gone away."

Peter sank peacefully back. After a while his mother said to him:

"Have you been grieving for anyone, Peter, during these last years?"

"Grieving?" Peter was making diagrams of the cracks and stains on the ceiling.

"You've been talking, Peter."

"What have I been talking about?" he idly inquired.

"You've been talking about your troubles."

"I haven't any troubles." Peter turned from the ceiling to his mother's face, feeling how pleasant it was to see her there.

"You've been talking about someone who troubled you," Mrs. Paragon persisted.

"But, mother," he objected, "you tell me she has gone away."

"There is no one else?"

"No one at all."

Peter lived deliciously for a week with his mother in the shaded room. He never seemed to have felt so happy. His mind was content to be idle. When he was tired of collecting into groups

the roses on the wall-paper, or watching for hours the blue square of the window across which once or twice in a day a bird would fly, he would ask his mother to read to him old tales of Ainsworth and Marryat. He affected an imperious self-indulgence.

It was decided at last that Peter was strong enough for the journey home. Cordial thanks and farewells were exchanged with the farmer and his wife. Peter even left a kind message for the farmer's granddaughter, who had fled for fear of infection. He no longer thought of her as one who could trouble him.

## XXVI

PETER soon picked up his strength at Hamingburgh. Three weeks passed and he thought of returning to London. Then came a letter from Marbury.

His uncle had applied for the Chiltern Hundreds, and Marbury was to stand at once in a contested by-election. He lightly but cordially asked Peter to come and stay with him through the fight and meet some of the distinguished people it would draw into the constituency.

Peter eagerly accepted. Next day he met Marbury at York, leaving the train to avoid a tedious slow journey of forty miles.

Lord Haversham's principal seat was at Highbury Towers, a lonely house on the edge of a moor. The nearest town was ten miles away.

It was a fortress of civilisation planted in a wilderness. In a bad winter, with snow lying deep, it was sometimes cut off for days from the world outside.

"There's something impudent about the place," said Marbury, as the car rushed over the moors. "It flies in the face of Nature. The Towers is the most comfortable home in England, and it is in a desert."

"A very beautiful desert," said Peter. He was

feasting on the superb line of a moor-end, red with the heather.

"You must see it in the winter. I went through last election with my uncle. It was December, and we did well if we managed to keep half our appointments."

"Tell me about your uncle."

"He's dying, Peter." Marbury conveyed this as a simple fact. He did not intend an effect.

"You mean that he's very ill," suggested Peter.

"I mean that he's dying. The doctors give him six months or a year in Egypt. Here they allow him till the autumn."

"When is he going away?"

"He isn't going away," answered Marbury. "He thinks it worth while to die at home." Again Marbury spoke without insisting in the least on the heroic implication of his words.

"But six months of life and the sun," protested Peter.

"Six months is not long. We have lived at Highbury for a thousand years. Besides, my uncle wants things to go smoothly when he dies. He is posting me up in the estate — all the small traditional things."

Marbury talked of these things with a curious tranquillity. He simply recorded them. He fell very silent; and at the journey's end looked with interest at the large old house at which they had arrived.

Marbury took Peter upstairs to a room beside

his own, and left to dress quickly for dinner. He would come back for Peter and show him the way down. When Peter was ready, he stood for a few minutes at the window. He looked on to a terrace and a garden which ended abruptly and fell suddenly to the moor. At the end of the terrace, magnificently poised and fronting desolation, was the copy of a famous statue by a contemporary sculptor, audaciously asserting the triumph of art — the figure of a naked youth superbly defiant.

Soon Marbury joined Peter at the window and put a hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"That's what I mean," he said, following Peter's look towards the statue in silhouette against the moor, "when I say that this place seems to fly in Nature's face. He's insolent, don't you think? He's looking over thirty miles of moor — not a house between himself and the open sea. In the winter the snow piles up against him, and storms bang into him from the German Ocean. He is the last exquisite word of the twentieth century asserting our mastery over all that."

Marbury waved his arm towards the open moor, and laughed an apology:

"He usually works me up like that. Let's have some dinner."

They went down, and Peter was made acquainted with many people whose names he tried to remember. His mind was whirling with impressions, unable to settle upon anything definite

till, at dinner, he had had time to recover from a sensation of being too much honoured. This sensation had invaded him at being introduced by Marbury to an exquisite young woman.

"Peter," he said, "this is my sister. Look after her, Mary, and tell her who everybody is."

Then Marbury had disappeared, leaving Peter shyly rising to her light chatter.

"The house is packed, and there are beds at the home-farm," she said as they sat to the table.

"Everybody is rushing to help Antony."

"Antony?" Peter echoed in a puzzled way.

"Don't you know his name?" she asked, looking towards Marbury.

"I'm afraid not," Peter confessed.

"But he called you Peter."

"Everybody calls me Peter."

"Why does everybody do that?"

"I don't know. Everybody does."

Peter was beginning to enjoy himself. Lady Mary smiled into his frank eyes, liking the direct way in which they looked at her.

They paused as Haversham came in to dinner. His empty chair always stood at the head of the table. Sometimes he was unable at the last moment to come down, but he never allowed anyone to wait or to inquire.

Peter looked at him with interest. He was yet at the prime, but grey and frail. His features were proud and delicate, his voice gravely penetrating. He was too far from Peter for his con-

versation to be heard, but he talked with lit face and a frequent smile. Sometimes, however, he fell silent, and Peter thought he detected the strained inward look of one struggling with physical pain.

"You don't know Uncle Eustace?" said Lady Mary, following Peter's look.

"Not yet."

"He will do you good."

"Antony was telling me about him on the way down."

They talked through dinner of indifferent things. The accent of conscious culture which Peter now cordially hated was missing. Yet the talk was alive — happily vivid and agreeable. No one seemed anxious to make an effort or to press home a conviction. Nor was Peter aware of words anxiously picked. He was unable yet to name his impression. He only knew that he talked more frankly of small things than he had talked before.

He noticed in a series of pleasant discoveries how beautiful was the setting of their talk. Lord Haversham had at Highbury brought the art of fine living to perfection. He had filled the place with costly things, without anywhere suggesting unreasonable luxury. Highbury Towers grew upon the visitor. Even as a guest began to wonder why he never seemed to have dined so well and been less brutally aware of it, he perceived that the glass he fingered was lovely and



rare, that it consonantly set off the china bowl which neighboured it, and the ancient candlesticks to left and right. Haversham had always held that true luxury was not insistent, and he was never so disappointed as when his guest broke into a compliment of a particular object. Had it perfectly agreed, fitting its environment, the mood of the conversation, the temperament of the party for which it was designed, it would, he urged, have passed unnoticed. It would have made its effect without directly speaking.

Peter was filled with an adventurous sense of novelty. He had not met people quite like these before. What was it which so clearly distinguished this company from any he had yet frequented? Clearly it was not their manners. Opposite Peter was a peer who took most of his soup indirectly by way of a long moustache, who wisely sat with his napkin well tucked in at the neck. His face reminded Peter of the farmer with whom he had lately laboured in the field; his talk was mostly of dogs, his vocabulary limited and racy. Yet he quite obviously went with the silver, whereas Peter could think of a dozen men he knew — men who had not only learned to feed with discretion, but had read all the most refined literature in three or four languages, and could talk like people in a stage drawing-room — who quite obviously would have jarred.

Peter comfortably surrendered to the charm of an atmosphere quietly genial and free. The

machinery alone of this new life pleased and fascinated. He felt that a beautifully ordered system had taken charge of him, that henceforth he had only to suffer himself to be moved comfortably through the day, that life was now a series of artfully arranged opportunities for free expression in suitable surroundings. This feeling had first invaded him as at York he had seen his baggage mysteriously vanishing, by no act of his own, into a strange car which started off even as he himself was being wrapped in warm rugs for the race to Highbury. It was confirmed later, when, reaching his room with Marbury, he had found the things which had so swiftly vanished at York faultlessly spread for his evening wear. Peter was rapidly putting forth roots in this new soil. Every moment some unexpected thing appeared, to be at once included in his total impression of a new life, to become part of the common round.

There was nothing snobbish in Peter's delight. He already desired to know these people better. But he was not in the least aware of anything which could be described as a social aspiration. He liked his new friends because they were new; and because they behaved differently from any he had as yet encountered. They were continually surprising him in small ways. More particularly he was startled by the intimacy and freedom of their talk. Their conversation was innocent of periphrasis and free from uncomfortable reserve.

Peter had heard nothing like it since he had talked with the old farmer under the hedge of his seven acre field.

When the men were alone, Marbury called Peter to the head of the table and introduced him to his uncle. Peter looked with an ardent respect at one who already had touched his imagination.

"I've heard of you," said Lord Haversham as Peter felt for a chair. "You're the man who forcibly removed the Lord Chamberlain's trousers."

"It wasn't the Lord Chamberlain," said Peter nervously.

Lord Haversham turned to Marbury: "I'm sure you told me it was a protest against the censorship of stage plays."

"That, Uncle, was another small affair."

"Then whose were the trousers?" persisted Haversham.

"They belonged to a Junior Prior," said miserable Peter.

"What was the protest this time?"

"Equality of treatment under the law," suggested Marbury. "But you're making Peter uncomfortable. He doesn't like to remember that he was once a man of ideas."

Haversham looked meditatively at Peter: "It must be splendid to believe so thoroughly in an idea that you are ready to remove the trousers of a Junior Prior."

"I was drunk," said Peter bluntly.

"Does that also explain the Lord Chamberlain?" asked Haversham, beginning to be interested.

"No," said Peter. "Then I was only a fool."

"I don't believe a word of it." Lord Haversham turned to Marbury: "Why does he say these things?"

"Peter is a bad case, Uncle. He runs all his ideas to death, and sickens at sight of the corpse. I read Peter two years ago. He was born young."

"I'm afraid he'll very soon exhaust Highbury," said Lord Haversham, smiling.

"No," blurted Peter.

"We haven't any ideas," said Haversham quaintly. "We grow on the soil here, labourers and landlords. Tony," he went on, putting his hand affectionately on Marbury's arm, "is almost perfectly the Radical's notion of a stupid squire. You never think, do you, Tony? You're just choked full of prejudices you can't explain. I'm ashamed of you, Tony. You remind me so perfectly of the sort of fool I was myself thirty years ago."

Lord Haversham looked at his nephew. There was a beautiful tenderness in his address. Almost as he spoke, an expression of great pain came into his eyes.

"I must leave you now," he said. "We will talk again."

He quietly slipped from the room, and the conversation was broken up.

Peter, in the later solitude of his room, sat meditating at length upon his evening. He could not yet define what he liked in Marbury's friends, but he felt his personal need of it. He lacked the frank nature and ease, the lightness and dexterity of these people. He trod too heavily, delivering his sentiments with a weight which was out of keeping. He felt he must get out of the habit — a habit which did not express or become him — of taking too seriously the frequent appeal for his views on this or that. What, after all, were these views that had always mattered so much? He saw his late companions at dinner as merry figures seated about a pool, idly throwing in pebbles to keep the water agreeably astir. Conversation, it seemed, was not something to be captured and led. It was an agreeable adventure in which the universe was sociably explored. The final word, which Peter so frequently was tempted to deliver, should never be spoken, for, after the final word, what more could decently be said?

## XXVII

THE next morning Peter was early in the breakfast room. Only Lady Mary was there. She was looking for weather at the window.

"Let me get you some breakfast," said Peter, after they had greeted.

"Not for the world," she answered, lifting lids at a side table. "I love breakfast. It's the only time when food seems to matter. I wouldn't think of letting anybody choose my breakfast."

"There, at any rate, we agree," said Peter.

"Do you like breakfast, too?"

"It's an Oxford habit."

"Then you haven't given up Oxford altogether?" said Lady Mary, speaking as one who had heard something.

"Do you know all about me, like everybody else?"

Peter groaned.

"Of course. You don't know how famous you are. Everybody knows you were sent down from Gamaliel for being a Socialist."

"I am not a Socialist," Peter hotly protested.

Lady Mary's eyes were full of mischief: "You must have been sent down for being something."

"I'm nothing at all," said Peter.

"Are you quite sure?"

"The silliest person alive is more than a label."

Peter cursed himself. He had again delivered an apothegm. Why must he always be so heavily serious? Lady Mary was openly smiling.

"I'm afraid we're all going to be very silly at Highbury during the next few days. We've simply got to label ourselves for Antony's sake."

"Tories," said Peter, trying to be nice, "are exceptions."

"You mean that Tories don't count?"

"I really don't mean that," said Peter, genuinely grieved.

"Then I'm afraid you don't mean anything at all."

Lady Mary was clearly amused. Peter miserably looked at her, looked at his plate, and then heard himself say:

"Why am I such a solemn ass?"

"Who says that?"

"I say it myself," said Peter.

Lady Mary looked swiftly at his ingenuous face, in which exaggerated abasement struggled with a hope that she would reassure him. Her amusement was curiously shot with affection.

"You oughtn't to have told me this so soon," she said, smiling at him in the friendliest way. "You see I don't yet know you well enough to contradict you. It would be rude."

"Let me get you another sausage," said Peter, feeling a little better.

As he brought her the food he saw her more

familiarly. Last night in her amazing dress she had seemed fragile and elaborate — all woman and social creature. But this morning he saw just a friendly girl, plainly suited in brown tweed, accessible and soothing. Now he really saw what she was like. He discreetly admired her hair and expressive eyes, her slender features and delicate complexion. She spoke on a clear note, level and quiet, suggesting that her ideas and feelings were regular and securely in leash. The music of her voice was vibrant but very sure. It declared a perfect balance, the voice of a woman who would not suffer to appear in any of her personal tones or gestures anything which could not beautifully be expressed.

At this point Marbury came into the room. Peter was bringing Lady Mary her sausage with the grave intentness of someone specially elected.

“Hullo, Mary. Hullo, Peter. You seem to be eating well.”

“Yes,” said Lady Mary. “This is my third sausage.”

“What does Peter say?”

“I’ve at last met someone who takes breakfast seriously.”

“I take everything seriously,” said Peter, returning into gloom.

“You needn’t be so unhappy about it,” said Marbury. “One good thing about an election is that it makes one realise the importance of being



earnest. Even the local paper becomes an immensely serious thing."

Marbury settled to his breakfast, shook out the *Highbury Gazette*, and was absorbed. Soon he was smiling.

"What is it, Tony?" asked Lady Mary, eating an apple.

"Listen to this," said Marbury. "It's one of Jordan's speeches."

"Who's Jordan?" Peter interrupted.

"My opponent," said Marbury. "He seems to be dangerous. He knows how to appeal to the people. He has just bought a house and some acres in the constituency, and he tells the Yorkshiremen that he's a farmer, with a stake in the county.

" 'Gentlemen,' he says, according to this report, 'you may perhaps be inclined to ask what this Mr. Jordan, a town-bred man and a stranger, knows about the land and the people on the land. Well, gentlemen, I'm a farmer myself — in a small way. (Cheers.) I have a hundred or so acres of good Yorkshire soil. (Cheers.) I have twenty head of cattle, some sheep and poultry, and only this morning I was admiring three fine stacks of hay built by the honest labour of your fellow townsmen. (Loud Cheers.) Gentlemen, I have come to live among you. (A great outburst of cheering, many of the audience rising and waving their hats.) ' "

"Is this what you call politics from within?" Peter scornfully interrupted.

"Now, Peter, don't despise the amusements of the people. They like to be governed in this way. I shall have to see the bailiff."

"I'm passing the home-farm," said Lady Mary. "I'll send him to you."

When she had gone, Marbury looked with amusement at Peter, chafing up and down the hearth-rug.

"Peter," he said, "compose yourself. The others will be coming down to breakfast."

"Why do you want the bailiff?" Peter curtly inquired.

"I'm thinking out a little light banter for Jordan. I want to know whether we can do better than twenty head of cattle and three fine stacks of hay."

"I suggest," said Peter, massively sarcastic, "that you make out a list of your hens and pigs and send it round the constituency."

Marbury considered this. "That, Peter, is an idea. I'll talk it over with the agent."

Peter flung up his hands in the gesture Marbury loved in him and always knew how to provoke.

"It's all damn nonsense," said Peter shortly.

"Jordan calls it democracy."

"Politics!" Peter exclaimed, with his nose in the air.

"I've told you before, Peter, not to despise politics. It's ignorant. We'll go into the garden."

They walked on the terrace and found Haversham in the portable hut where he usually spent the day. He had been ordered by the doctors to live out of doors. Here he wrote letters, interviewed his tenants, and ordered the affairs of his estate and fortune. He was seldom alone, unless he wished it, for his friends treasured every moment they were able to spend with him.

Peter and Marbury paused at the open side of the hut, turned, as always, towards the sun. Marbury, before they reached Lord Haversham, had time to tell Peter that his uncle did not like his health to be talked about.

"What is the programme?" Haversham asked as they came up.

"Eight meetings to-day, Uncle."

Haversham tapped the paper he was holding:

"You've seen Jordan's latest?"

"We were talking about it," said Marbury.

"What are you going to do?" asked Haversham.

"Peter suggests we should post the constituency with a schedule of your stock on the home-farm."

Peter glowered at Marbury, but a moment after felt amiably foolish under Haversham's kind inspection.

"You don't expect me to believe that, Tony," said Haversham. "But, seriously, don't let your agent do anything of the kind. He'll probably suggest it."

"I wonder."

“It wouldn't do. If you were a Radical like Jordan you could tell them you owned the whole constituency. In a Radical it would show good faith and a likeliness to look after local interests. But in a Tory it is bribery and coercion. Your leaflet would be published in the London Radical papers — Another Instance of Tory Intimidation.”

“You see, Peter,” said Marbury, “we shall have to be tactful.”

“Why notice the speech at all?” asked Peter.

“Because we are electioneering,” said Marbury. “We're not here for fun. My enemy has sent out a leaflet: ‘Vote for Jordan, the farmer, and the farmer's friend’ — the implication, of course, being that I am neither a farmer nor a farmer's friend. It's much more important in an agricultural constituency to destroy this delicate suggestion than to prove that there is an absolute need for a Navy Bill next session of over sixty millions.”

“Yes,” objected Peter, “but the whole thing is so ridiculous.”

Haversham sighed: “That's what makes public life so hard. It is especially hard for our people. There's nothing we dread more than losing touch with our sense of humour. But these sacrifices are necessary. These sixty millions have to be raised, and only Antony will raise them.”

“You see, Peter,” Marbury interposed, “the sense of duty is not yet extinct. Please look less

incredulous. Then we'll go and talk to the farmers."

"Why do you take me?" Peter grunted. "Why not take someone who really understands?"

"I have set my mind on taking you," said Marbury finally. "But you must be less critical. You will hear me say some obvious things. Please understand that I am quite honestly accepting a public duty, and don't look as if you were infinitely wiser and better, because you are not."

Peter felt the sincerity of this appeal. He turned impulsively to Haversham.

"Antony"—Peter used the name with shy pleasure—"has a way of putting me in the wrong."

Haversham smiled: "I'm sure you are excellent for one another," he said. "It does Antony good to realise that he is elderly for his years."

A servant came from the house and announced that the bailiff was waiting for Marbury. Peter was left for a time with his host, who drew him to talk easily of the days at Gamaliel and in town. Peter tried to explain how in suburban London he had failed to realise his hopes.

"Perhaps," Haversham suggested, "you put the intellectual average too high?"

"It wasn't that," said Peter eagerly. "I hope I haven't seemed too clever or anything of that kind. But somehow I was never comfortable. The more intelligence I found, the less I liked it."

“ You felt, in fact, rather like a modern statesman measuring the results of popular education. He realises that he has educated the crowd just enough to be taken in by a smart electioneer. Happily there is wisdom still in Sandhaven. Our people will vote for Antony because they like him. They know he feels rightly about things. Jordan’s cleverness doesn’t appeal to them. He doesn’t know the difference between a swede and a turnip.”

“ Then the seat is safe? ” concluded Peter.

Haversham smiled.

“ Not altogether, ” he said. “ I got in last election by five hundred. There are some miners in the west corner, and there is a harbour at Sandhaven. The Government Whip has obscurely implied that votes for Jordan will be votes for the harbour. The harbour badly wants doing up.”

“ But that is corruption. ”

“ I’m afraid not, ” corrected Haversham. “ It is politics. ”

Marbury joined them from the house, telling Peter to be ready for a rush over the moors. In half an hour they started alone, provided for the day. The meetings were appointed in small villages near Sandhaven, where they would spend the night.

The ordered luxury of Highbury gave to their plunge into the wilderness a keener pleasure. Peter was free to enjoy the spacious loveliness of the moors — to enjoy it at ease in the best possible

way. The contours of the country here were gradual and vast, but the speed at which they ran defeated monotony. The line of the greater banks shifted perpetually as they flew. Their colour came and went, changing at every mile the palette of the spread gorse and heather. Peter's joy was complete when from a high point of the moors he discovered the sea alive with the sun.

The meetings began at noon with an informal handshaking of farmers in a tiny market-town not far from Sandhaven. They continued through the day in schoolhouses, lamplit as darkness fell, and they ended at Sandhaven in an orthodox demonstration, with a chairman and a Union Jack and the local committee importantly throned on a large platform. Except at this final meeting Marbury talked quite simply to the electors. Already he knew the majority of them personally. He was aware of their circumstances, family history, the troubles of their farming, their prejudices and characters. He knew the local jokes — who had made rather a better bargain with his horse than the purchaser, who, under feminine pressure, had lately turned from chapel to church. Peter marvelled through the day at the prodigious industry implied in Marbury's knowledge, confessed to be yet imperfect, of the estate to which he was succeeding. Peter admired, too, the perfection of Marbury's manner. He never condescended. Nor was he familiar in the way of a candidate seeking to be popular. He talked with his own

people, in whom he was interested, for whom he had a right to care. Neither in himself nor in his tenants to be was there any of that uneasy pride of place which spoils a community whose members are busily asserting their rank. Marbury behaved, without self-consciousness, as part of a traditional system. He was met in the same way by men as yet untouched with the snobbery of labour.

Only at Sandhaven, where there was a strong opposition, did Marbury adopt the political or platform manner. Here he was called upon to explain to his audience why he considered that a personal landlord was better for agriculture than the local council. To Peter this seemed ludicrously unnecessary after what he had seen that day in the villages.

Towards the close of the meeting in Sandhaven, when questions were being asked, Peter, from the platform, saw Marbury's agent speak to a member of the audience. Marbury saw it too.

"He realises I've shirked Jordan, the farmer's friend," he whispered to Peter.

The man whom the agent had prompted now rose and addressed Marbury:

"Will Lord Marbury tell us what title Mr. Jordan has to call himself the farmer's friend?"

Marbury rose, and picked a cutting of Jordan's speech from the table.

He read aloud the passages Peter had heard at breakfast, and deftly played with them. Peter admired the ease with which Mr. Jordan's pre-



tensions as a farmer were justly measured without any assumption in Marbury of superiority or rural *snobbisme*. His speech was pointed throughout with hearty laughter and cheers. It effectually countered the speech of his opponent, but it gave no handle anywhere for a charge that Marbury desired to use his position as an argument for his return.

"Peter," said Marbury, as they were leaving the platform, "you will hear that speech of mine forty times, in forty moods and tenses, during the next ten days. Please don't imagine that I enjoy it. But you saw the agent. He would not let me escape, even for twenty-four hours. He knows how important it is."

Over a late supper at the hotel, Peter shared with Marbury his impressions of the day.

"Frankly," he said, "I admired you most of the time."

"Beginning to think better of politics?"

"Politics don't seem to count much in this election."

"Platform politics don't. The people here are only just discovering them. I hear, by the way, that the Government Whips have arranged a debauch for next week. They're sending down Wenderby. My agent, who despises me, is frightened."

"Your agent ought to be jolly well pleased with you," said Peter indignantly.

"He is not," Marbury asserted. "He thinks

I'm too refined. He wants me to tell the people I'm going to inherit seventy thousand acres. He tells me not to cut marble with a razor. He wants it coarse."

They slept at Sandhaven, working back to Highbury on the following day. It was comparatively an easy journey, and they were back at Highbury in time for dinner.

Peter drifted shyly towards Lady Mary, and again was next to her.

"This is lucky," she said as they sat down. "You can tell me about Antony's meetings."

"I'm afraid I don't know the difference between a bad meeting and a good one," said Peter. "But Antony was pleased."

"Have you been speaking?" she asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"What could I say?" objected Peter.

"Antony tells me you are quite an orator."

"But this is different," Peter pleaded.

"Why is it different?"

"Well, you see, I can talk when I really believe in things and have a lot to say."

"Don't you believe in Antony?" asked Lady Mary. She was determined not to let him off.

"Yes," Peter admitted.

"Then why not talk about him?"

"But what about politics?" Peter objected.

"Haven't you any politics?"

"They all seem to be going," said Peter dis-

mally. "Things aren't so simple as I thought."

"One thing is simple enough," said Lady Mary, looking serenely at Peter. "Antony is a better man for Sandhaven than Mr. Jordan."

"I'm sure he is," Peter gladly agreed.

"Very well then. You must speak for Antony."

"Why do you insist?" asked Peter, hoping for a compliment.

"Because," said Lady Mary, resolved to disappoint him, "it will be good for Antony. It doesn't matter what you say. Our farmers will look at your honest face. Then they will measure your strong back. Then they will believe you are as good a man as themselves, especially if you halt a little in your speech. Antony is too fluent, and he is not sufficiently robust."

## XXVIII

DURING the next few weeks Peter drifted rapidly into being a Tory. He soon talked himself into a conviction that Marbury must win for national as well as personal reasons. Moreover, in his encounter with the miners of the western end of the constituency, he had an opportunity of measuring the evil effect upon clouded minds of the simple demogogy practised on the other side. Peter provoked more than one riot by the contempt with which he challenged the cheap phrases whereby Mr. Jordan's electioneers were campaigning against squires and men of property. Fresh from a contemplation of Haversham's quiet heroism and devoted industry, he was amazed at the success with which English landlords were presented as conspirators against humanity. He was even more amazed at the impudent assurance with which their opponents, relying almost entirely upon popular text-books, raised a whirlwind of prejudice in favour of replacing men like Haversham by a committee of tradesmen. Arrived from these hot meetings in the West, Peter would stand beside his window and look upon a stream of visitors waiting upon Haversham. Already Haversham was told by the doctors to be ready

for the end, and he was now deep in a last review of the estate.

Only half a dozen people knew that this was a grand inquest and farewell, but many of the men with whom Haversham spoke realised they would not see him again. Their affection appeared in a solicitude clumsily expressed, but Haversham encouraged no sentiment, and with easy simplicity checked in his visitors any dwelling upon their personal loss.

Peter especially remembered the last time he sat in the small hut. Instinctively he avoided the thing that filled his mind. Not a word was spoken to suggest that Haversham was an invalid. When Peter came to recall their conversation, he realised that he had talked exclusively of himself under Haversham's quiet prompting. He still saw the interested smile, lighting the face of his host — now brilliant with fever and eloquent with the gesture of his spirit. Long afterwards, Peter shamefully realised how this man, already in the shadow of death, had, in perfect sincerity, bent as from the clouds to encourage his young egoism and to listen.

A few days later, Peter attended a mass meeting of Marbury's opponents. It was Wenderby's meeting, held in the western corner of the constituency, in contempt of landowners. Peter knew nothing of Wenderby beyond his public reputation. He saw in Wenderby only the brass and swagger which, for political purposes, he chose to affect. Peter was deceived. Wenderby was a politician

of exquisite finesse, playing the political bruiser partly out of genuine love for his country, partly from a deeply calculated personal ambition. His speech in this by-election well illustrated the intricacy of modern politics under their superficial simplicity. Ostensibly it denounced all Tories and pleaded for economy in naval expenditure. Actually it was Wenderby's cover for a set campaign for extorting as much money out of his own party for the Service as he dared.

Wenderby's position in Marbury's constituency was every way a snare for the politically innocent. He was a friend of Haversham, and usually a guest at Highbury. But, as he wrote to Haversham, to stay at Highbury in the present crisis would perhaps be regarded as a breach of political decency. Peter, seeing in Wenderby the public enemy of a nobleman whose hospitality the speaker had himself enjoyed, could not contain his rage. Wenderby's rhetorical periods were launched with deadly effect at a simmering audience.

At the close of the meeting, Peter, red with anger, rose to ask whether certain remarks concerning the landlords of England were intended to have a personal and local application. Wenderby, seeing he had only to do with a youngster who had lost his temper, smoothly evaded him. Peter sprang to his feet:

“ Sir — ” he began.

Immediately there were shouts of “ Order ! ”

and "Turn him out!" Peter obstinately stood.

"I insist," he shouted, "that my question be answered. An infamous insinuation ——"

At this point Peter was choked by half a dozen dirty hands grabbing from all quarters at his neck. He was thrust gasping and struggling from the hall — his coat in ribbons. His battered hat and collar were derisively thrown after him, as he bitterly explained to the police that he was not drunk and disorderly.

Peter showed himself that night to Marbury and stormily told his tale. Marbury, to his mortification, only laughed.

"What is amusing you?" asked Peter, very short and stony.

"Everything."

"For example?"

"I don't know where to begin. First, you were shouting at the wrong man. Wenderby is the favourite godson of Uncle Eustace. He's the only man we can trust."

"But he's on the other side."

"In a way he is."

"He will lose you the seat."

"Perhaps. This by-election is only an incident. Wenderby's speech to-night was one of a series. Unfortunately it happens to lie in our constituency. Wenderby has to manage his own people."

Peter flung up his hands. "I don't understand these politics."

Marbury looked affectionately at Peter. Peter had met Marbury going to his room. He was without a collar, and he looked forlorn. Marbury put a hand on his arm:

"Wenderby shall apologise," he said gravely. "He's a charming fellow, and he is very fond of young people."

Lady Mary, fresh from canvassing, shared a late supper with Marbury and Peter. She joined with her brother to wring from Peter a full account of his adventure. Peter began sorely, but at last detected in Lady Mary an unconfessed approval. Clearly she liked him for his protest. He even dared to think that she admired. Peter was gradually more happy, and soon was enjoying his escapade. He even displayed, in mock heroism, the large blue marks upon his neck.

Later, in his room, Peter found in the events of the day a consecration of his devotion to Eustace Haversham. Unessential incidents fell away, and he was glad of his protest — mistaken though it seemed, and ridiculous.

Next day was Sunday, and meetings were suspended. The house was very quiet, and Haversham was not in his usual place. Marbury told Peter he might not again come down.

After dinner, Peter slipped on to the terrace and faced the shadowy moor, lifting his head to a faint breeze from the sea. He stood beside the bronze figure he had so often admired. Before him was the wilderness, but civilisation was behind



in the murmured voices from the drawing-room and those harsher cries Peter had lately heard from men made selfish and bitter.

Surely it was well that this triumphant figure should brave the desert, and that in its shadow a beautiful life should be passing. It flung out the challenge of art and wisdom. It was a consummation for which millions worked, and now it confidently stood, as though aware of what it had cost, resolved that it was well worth the price. Peter wondered whether it were justified.

His dreaming was broken. Lady Mary rustled beside him.

"You have found this place?" she said after a silence. They watched the superb silhouette of the statue fading as the light emptied rapidly from the sky.

"I am wondering whether he is worth while?" said Peter, waving his hand at the figure between them.

"What is your riddle?"

"He has cost a thousand lives."

"You are talking like a Socialist," said Lady Mary curtly.

Peter felt in her a coldness that passed. She was looking over the moors as though she followed the blind eyes of the naked boy. Her attitude suggested that she, too, was part of this challenge. Her dress, conveying to Peter an impression of complicated and finished art, fell away from her shoulders as, with head flung back, she filled her

eyes with the beauty of earth and sky. She interpreted in radiant life the cold metal of the statue. Civilisation was justified in her, or it could not be justified.

"Have you never any doubt?" said Peter, wistfully impulsive.

Lady Mary turned slowly from the moor. Her calm eyes swept over him.

"Doubt?" she echoed.

"Do you never wonder whether all this"—Peter made one of the large gestures of his mother—"is worth the noise and the dirt over there? Have you no doubt at all?"

"How is it possible to doubt?" she calmly responded. She stood proudly facing him. But she read perplexity in his face and, as it seemed to Peter, she stooped to him.

"Don't you see," she almost pleaded, "that either we must believe in ourselves or make way; and we do believe. I believe in all this"—she faintly parodied Peter's large gesture—"and I believe in myself."

There was a pause, and it was Lady Mary who spoke again. Almost it seemed that she wanted to make her point.

"You, at any rate," she urged him, "have learned to believe a little." She looked towards the hut on the terrace, and Peter followed her thoughts.

The trees stirred a moment, and laughter came from the open room. But these two heard only

the voice of Eustace Haversham, and saw his lighted features vivid in memory. The last colour of the sunset was full upon her as she faced her uncle's empty place. Its emptiness to-night was an omen of the eternal emptiness to come. Her mouth quivered, and tears shone suddenly under her lids as she turned again to Peter.

"I believe he is worth the whole world," she said, and her voice broke.

Her tears seemed to remove every barrier. Peter saw in her eyes an appeal for an equal faith. She felt the drops on her cheek, and turned away into the shadow.

"I, too, believe," Peter deeply whispered.

Then he noticed how her hand lay unprotected upon the pedestal of the statue, vaguely delicate upon the hard metal.

He impulsively bent and touched it with his lips. She did not start or cry out, but turned again slowly towards him. She read in his eyes faith merely and dedication.

"I am glad you did that," she said in a level voice.

Then they went, as by consent, towards the lighted windows of the drawing-room.

Next morning, ten days before polling day at Sandhaven, Peter was summoned away by telegram to Hamingburgh. His uncle had suddenly been stricken seriously ill. Peter bade his friends a quick farewell and caught the first train from York.

## XXIX

WHEN Peter found his uncle stretched helplessly in bed with all the ceremony about him of an urgent case, he reproached himself for having thought of him so little during his years of health. He had taken his uncle for granted as the sanguine and gracious benefactor. It had not occurred to him to probe the motives of his uncle's affection, or to ask whether he was making him an adequate return.

Now it was too late. When Peter arrived in Hamingburgh his uncle was already unconscious, and he did not recover sufficiently to recognise his nephew. A sudden seizure ended with a rush of blood to the brain; and Peter was left heir to a personal estate of over £90,000. Peter had to be content with his mother's assurance that his uncle died with entire faith in his nephew's ability to spend a fortune.

The next weeks passed in ending all connection with Hamingburgh, which Peter now found intolerable, and in preparing for life in London commensurate with his new ideas. He took rooms for himself and his mother in Curzon Street, to be made ready for the autumn season.

"We will have everything very beautiful, and we will have only what is necessary," he told his

mother as they talked things over in their flat at Golder's Green. "Of course we must sell all this stuff."

He waved his hands in an inclusive gesture toward the chairs and tables. Mrs. Paragon mildly looked about her.

"But, Peter, I thought you liked all this pretty furniture."

"It's modern," said Peter briefly. "There is no such thing as modern furniture. Ask Marbury."

He came and sat on the arm of his mother's chair.

"I must get Marbury to help. I want to see you talking to Lady Mary over a tea-table by the Brother's Adam."

"Peter, this is the third time to-day you have mentioned Lord Marbury's sister."

"Naturally, mother. This is polling day at Highbury. I've been wondering how things are going."

A few days later Marbury came to town and took his seat as member for Sandhaven. Peter secured him for the following evening, and they all three dined together at the flat in Golder's Green. Marbury was called upon for advice as to Curzon Street.

"Peter," he said, "this is a new phase. Don't encourage him, Mrs. Paragon. He wasn't intended for an exquisite. He's too robust."

"He does not need encouraging," said Mrs.

Paragon. She had calmly accepted Peter's new enthusiasm, and now only wondered how long it would endure.

"Peter has already sold all our furniture," she added by way of information. "It will disappear at the end of the week."

"What are you going to do in the meantime?" asked Marbury, exchanging an intelligible smile with Mrs. Paragon.

Mrs. Paragon quietly answered him, unaware of the irony which lurked in her undisturbed acceptance of the inevitable.

"Peter says that no one stays in London during these next months. He says we must go to the North of Scotland."

"What are you going to do there?" asked Marbury.

"Peter is going to fish," said Mrs. Paragon.

When the time came Mrs. Paragon discovered that her part in the holiday in North Britain was to attend Peter during long happy days in lonely places where Peter mysteriously dangled in lakes and rivers. She dreamed away the time beside the basket of food and shared with Peter pleasant meals under the sky, quickened with his lively account of the morning's work.

News came once into their wilderness when Eustace Haversham died. In the letters Peter exchanged with Marbury and his sister he learned that the end had come at the close of a happy day

in the sun, with people arriving and departing upon the terrace at Highbury. Haversham had smilingly received the congratulations of his friends upon his better health; then, with a look in his eyes showing that he at any rate knew better, he had died as the light fell from the bronze figure fronting the moor.

In long hours upon loch and river Peter sometimes thought of Lady Mary and their last meeting. He thought of her less as a woman than a lovely symbol of the life he was now called to lead. She stood in his eye, radiant and proud, thrown into relief by a mutter of poverty and ill-will. She was for Peter the supreme achievement of the time. The cool touch of her hand on his lips raised in him no remembered rapture. It had been not a personal caress but an act of worship, for which he could imagine no other possible expression. She charmed him, and made him afraid. The delicate play of her mind was intimately enjoyed by Peter in retrospect when he was able to realise the indulgence with which she had met his blundering.

Peter remembered his father and his years of revolt without misgiving for the way he now seemed to be taking. These memories enforced him towards all for which Lady Mary now stood. He so clearly had been wrong.

Early in September Peter and his mother returned to London. Peter, fearing to be bantered,

furnished the rooms in Curzon Street without advice. The season was just beginning when they took possession.

Peter soon read in the fashionable intelligence that Lord Haversham — Marbury had shed the younger title — had come to town for the autumn session. He also saw that Wenderby had been staying at Highbury as the guest of Lady Mary and her brother. This displeased Peter. He would not surrender his animosity against Wenderby, or admit that he was mistaken. He owed this to himself in justification of his outbreak during the election. Now that he read Wenderby's name beside the name of Lady Mary, Peter was surprised to find how much he distrusted the man. He threw down the paper in a small passion.

"Why, Peter," said Mrs. Paragon, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing, mother."

Mrs. Paragon tried another way of approach.

"What's the news this morning?" she lightly inquired.

"Lord Haversham has come to town."

"With Lady Mary?" Mrs. Paragon quickly asked.

"Yes," said Peter. "Also with Lord Wenderby." He kicked the newspaper and went to the window.

"I see," said Peter's mother.

Perhaps Mrs. Paragon was right, and Peter was really jealous. Wenderby clearly belonged to the



party which had arrived in town. He knew the language. He did not make heroically foolish scenes at a public meeting. Probably he had never incurred the laughter of Lady Mary. She did not make allowances for him, or look at him with protection in her eyes, or take an interest in him as someone from a strange world. Wenderby knew all that Peter had yet to learn.

Peter himself was worried to account for his ill humour, and even came to the point of asking himself the question which his mother had already answered. He decided that he was not personally jealous. Rather he was jealous of the privilege and experience which made Wenderby at home and at ease in the world which Peter desired to enjoy. Haversham had told him that Wenderby was a charming fellow. Peter wondered whether he would ever be a charming fellow; and, in a fit of misgiving, began to exhaust the possibilities of self-contempt. He had had a glimpse of the beautiful life; but suppose he were not worthy to enter. Suppose Haversham could not be the friend of a young colt who had nothing in the world to fit him for an agreeable part in the social comedy. Suppose he would never again come into touch with exquisite creatures like Lady Mary. Suppose he were doomed to follow the witty pageant of London life (which now was a Paradise in Peter's fancy) only through the columns of the fashionable intelligence. Suppose it were his destiny henceforth to hear of Lady

Mary only when she happened to be entertaining Wenderby.

Peter was chewing this bitter cud at his mother's tea-table in Curzon Street when his man-servant (Peter, to his mother's dismay, had insisted on a man-servant) announced the figures of his meditation by name. Peter rose in a whirl, and before he had possession of his mind Haversham and Wenderby were taking tea with Mrs. Paragon. Mrs. Paragon received her guests with monumental calm, answered their inquiries after her holiday in Scotland with a quiet precision which suggested an irony of which really she was quite incapable, and wondered meanwhile why Peter was less talkative than a meeting with his best friend seemed to require.

"Peter," said Haversham at last, "you seem depressed."

"Not at all." Peter was the more laconic because he was suffering a quiet, persistent scrutiny from Wenderby.

"This," said Wenderby, "is surely not the sanguine young man who brought me to judgment."

"You remember that?" asked Peter briefly.

"I have come to apologise," Wenderby explained.

"I told you he should apologise," said Haversham.

"Isn't that for me to do?" asked Peter.

"I don't think so," Wenderby smiled. "You lost your collar and were nearly strangled."

"I would do it again," said Peter cheerfully.

"I admit the provocation," agreed Wenderby. He was quite unruffled by the vibrant conviction of Peter's voice.

"You must make allowances, Peter," put in Haversham. "It was a misfortune for all of us. That speech might have lost me the seat. Wenderby always puts public interest before personal feeling."

"The speech was a great success," said Wenderby. "It did not lose the seat, but it won the Cabinet. I have wrung out fifty-seven millions. The Tories could hardly have done better."

"No politics," protested Haversham. "Peter doesn't understand."

"How is Lady Mary?" asked Peter suddenly.

Haversham's phrase about "personal feeling" had stuck in his mind.

Wenderby glanced keenly at Peter, so keenly that Peter at once felt his question had touched a nerve.

"You must come and see for yourself," said Haversham. "We're moving into Arlington Street and Mary is being worried with decorators. She has even interviewed a plumber. I suggest that you look in at the Ballet to-night and encourage her."

"How shall I encourage her?" Peter gloomily asked.

"You are young, Peter, and youth is infectious."

“ I wish I could catch it,” said Wenderby; and Peter detected envy.

Shortly after they had left Peter made ready for Covent Garden. His master-thought was to get into touch with the life which at Highbury had so urgently attracted him. An encounter with Lady Mary would be the touchstone of his claim to be socially accepted. Also Peter knew that Wenderby would be there. He had seen in Wenderby the faintest gesture of annoyance when Haversham had mentioned the Ballet. Peter was sensitive to the least indication in Wenderby of a special interest in Lady Mary. Already there was a mutual faint dislike. Peter resented the keen appraisement of Wenderby's searching eyes. He felt the rapid working of a trained and subtle mind busily estimating his value. Wenderby, for his part, detected in Peter a wilful energy which, as a politician, he abhorred.

Mrs. Paragon preferred not to accompany Peter. He dined alone with her, and she found him clouded and cold. Afterwards he picked his way by cab to the Opera House, sitting bolt upright with a vague presage of complications to ensue. He joined the happy few carried to pleasure through the shining streets. Summer lingered wherever a foothold was offered to the green. It was warm, with cool air soft as the hum of the London traffic. But Peter's senses were shut to his position of ease. He was restive still under the penetrating eyes of Wenderby. He felt as if

he were going into an arena. More than one woman turned in the crush of cars at Covent Garden to look at Peter's vivid, ingenuous face as he sat erect, frowning a little, staring blindly ahead. He was not actually thinking. Curious faint emotions came and went. His consciousness was ruled by a shimmering figure, infinite in grace and promise; but it rested under the threat of a cloud, which now was seen to grow dark and then to vanish.

A little later Peter found Lady Mary with his glasses; Wenderby stood beside her in the box. She saw Peter almost as his glasses were levelled, and leaned eagerly forward to greet him. Wenderby looked like one interrupted, and Peter could see how thoughtful he suddenly became. Then the lights were lowered.

### XXX

WHEN Peter, in the interval between the first and second ballet, entered the box of Lady Mary he formally embarked upon his career as a social figure.

Wenderby was Lady Mary's companion of the evening, for he sat securely beside her as Peter came. But she was radiantly pleased to welcome Peter, and even seemed anxious to exaggerate her pleasure.

The two men were vividly contrasted. Peter stood for youth — resilient, athletic, and eager. Wenderby as perfectly expressed the wisdom, tolerance, and disillusion of one who already had lived. He had just successfully finished a hard campaign in the country, and he was tired. The lines of his forehead were deeper to-night than he knew.

Lady Mary's cordial reception scattered Peter's vague misgiving. It restored to him the woman who, on the terrace at Highbury, had accepted his worship, thanked him, and understood.

"Your mother isn't here?" she said, as Peter found a chair.

"I could not persuade her."

"I must know her at once. Antony is quite positive about it."

“Antony is right,” said Peter. “She is wonderful.”

“Lord Wenderby is more fortunate than I am. He has seen her already.”

“I’m afraid of her,” said Wenderby. “She has that sort of silence which spoils my best conversation.”

“You mustn’t allow Lord Wenderby to frighten you.” Peter paused, and added quite simply: “You will love my mother.”

“I must meet her at once; but I cannot go out to-morrow. Will you bring her to me at Arlington Street?”

Peter at this was entirely happy. How could he have doubted that his precious intimacy with Lady Mary would be broken. Talking thus of his mother, she invited him to come closer yet. Peter wondered if Wenderby had ever seen her tears. She passed through her hands a string of pearls that hung about her neck, and Peter saw in them the frozen symbol of drops more precious. His eyes, as this conceit came into his mind, rested upon the stones as they fell through her fingers. He did not know he was looking at the hand he had kissed. Lady Mary drew it behind her fan.

“You like my pearls?” she said abruptly.

Peter started a little.

“They are very beautiful, but you do not need them,” he said bluntly.

The crudity of his compliment was more effective than the most artful flattery. Wenderby

looked wistfully at the two young faces, conscious that between them youth was singing. Peter's adoration was plainly written, and Lady Mary received it with a delicate flush of colour and a perceptible nervousness. Wenderby had never before seen her in the least perturbed.

He hastily turned the conversation, commenting on the ballet they had just seen — a ballet of lust and blood. It had stepped from the pages of Sir Richard Burton, barbaric in colour and music — frankly sadistic.

“ This,” he said, indicating the rows of brilliant and respectable people who had watched it, “ is a feast indeed for the cynical. How many of these people realise what they have seen? How horrified they would be if you told them in plain English what they have just heard in plain music! ”

“ You are a musician? ” Peter asked politely.

“ Enough of a musician to know that even Sir Richard Burton never spoke plainer than this Russian fellow. It seems to me quite extraordinary that civilised people are able to sit serenely beside one another in a public place and hear things which they would blush to read in a private room.”

It was strange that this ballet should recall a chapter almost forgotten. Peter, looking at Lady Mary, saw again a cherry-coloured ribbon folded between the leaves of her brother's book. Peter knew she had not touched that old fever. He could not think of her as kindling him in that sav-



age way. He saw himself forever humbly repeating the caress of adoration.

Peter left at the end of the interval, fearing too eagerly to force himself. It was enough that he was to see Lady Mary again on the following day.

## XXXI

PETER'S appearance at Covent Garden precipitated in Wenderby an action upon whose brink he had stood for several weeks. He called upon Lady Mary in the morning and asked for her. She came into the room bravely affecting surprise. But too well she knew what was coming.

"Lord Wenderby," she began, "this is wonderful."

"That I should come to see you?"

"I read in the *Times* that a Cabinet was called for this morning. Surely you should be there."

Wenderby shrugged his shoulders.

"The Cabinet," he said, "will be happier as they are."

"You say that bitterly."

"It's bitter truth," he answered. "I'm in the wrong set."

There was a short silence, and Lady Mary found it intolerable.

"Have you come just to grumble and go?" she inquired at last.

Wenderby paused a moment, as if looking for a way to open his mind; then he said abruptly:

"I'm going to rat."

"To leave the Cabinet?" Lady Mary exclaimed. She was now sincerely astonished.

"Perhaps," said Wenderby, looking at her in-

tently. "It's in my mind. Politics are going to be very violent during these next years. All my friends are with the Opposition. My position will be dreary and difficult."

Lady Mary began to see his drift, and was dismayed at the sudden sinking of her spirit.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked.

"I want you to help me," said Wenderby, and again he looked at her.

"How can that be?" she protested, avoiding his eyes.

"I'm not yet sure what I ought to do. I shall be giving up a great deal in leaving the Cabinet. I'm the youngest minister with a platform following. In a few years I should be leading the Party."

"What would become of your principles?" Lady Mary objected.

"They would suffer," he curtly replied. "But I should do my best for them. At any rate, I should do less harm than any other conceivable head of a Liberal Cabinet."

"You would be a fraud," she flashed.

"Not without justification," he coolly answered.

"Sophistry."

"Not at all. Making the best of a bad business."

Again there was silence. Wenderby found it difficult to come to the point. It was again Lady Mary who spoke.

"Have you come to me for advice?" she asked.

“Partly that.”

“Then I advise you to follow your conscience,” she said decisively.

“That is just the difficulty,” he pleaded. “My conscience is vague.”

“It tells you to come over.”

Wenderby smiled. “Naturally you say that. My desertion now would shake the Government. Perhaps we might even pull them down. There’s a chance.”

“Your duty is clear,” she insisted.

“I do not think so,” he objected. “The Government may stand in spite of me. Then my moderating influence is destroyed. Is it my duty to put this uncertain thing to the proof?”

There was a short silence. Lady Mary saw Wenderby’s logical trap closing about her. He bent eagerly towards her, and a pleading note came into his voice. Lady Mary could not deny that it pleasurably moved her to detect under the steel of his manner the suspense of entire sincerity. He utterly depended upon her answer.

“My conscience,” he said, “does not help me. I cannot balance the right and wrong of this business. I want a better reason. I want the best reason in the world. I want you to be my wife.”

Lady Mary did not move. Wenderby’s sincerity saved him from the protest with which she had thought to meet it. Nearly a minute passed.

“You understand?” said Wenderby at last.

"I think I understand," she slowly answered, "that this is not exactly what it seems."

"Does it seem so terrible?" he pleaded. "Consider it from my point of view."

"You say that, if I marry you, you will leave the Cabinet. That is my price."

"Obviously, if you consented to marry me, it would be my crowning motive for coming to your people. It is a natural consequence."

"It is my price," she insisted.

"You are brutal," he said in a low voice.

Lady Mary flushed a little. "You do not like my word. Shall we say inducement? You tell me you will leave the Cabinet, but you do not trouble to ask me whether I care for you."

"Is that necessary?" said Wenderby, quite simply. "I know you too well. You like me and trust me. I think you admire me a little. I am forty-seven. I do not urge you to passion. I have appealed to you as a woman who can weigh the things of youth against other things, more important perhaps, certainly more enduring. I have been candid with you."

Lady Mary sighed.

"I wonder," she said, "how many English girls have been talked to in this way?"

"You are not just an English girl. You are Lord Haversham's sister."

"You mean," said Lady Mary sadly, "that I have no right to be loved in the common way?"

Again there was a short silence. Wenderby

then rose, and put his hand upon Lady Mary's arm. He spoke now as one who loved her and understood.

"I know," he said, "exactly what this choice means. I want you to be my wife, and I mean to use every argument to persuade you. But I am going to be quite frank. When you marry me you will be turning away from a great deal. But I will hold you very precious. We shall always be comrades. Can you do this? To me it seems a choice between marrying for yourself and marrying for all that we hold most dear. Realise what our marriage would mean. Already we have wealth and social leading. Soon we should have supreme political office. There is no really able man of my age on the Tory side. Our house would be the absolute fortress of all we hold precious in the country. There is no one in whom I could so confidently trust as you."

Lady Mary looked steadily at this vision. She knew it could be realised. She measured the full stature of Wenderby, and answered the call of her own talent. At last she spoke, rather as though she wondered to herself than talked with another:

"But our marriage. What would our marriage be?"

"Always entirely as you wished. I should wait for you still, and hope to win you. I should never put away that hope. But I should not take you for granted."

"I cannot do things by half," she said, bravely

meeting him. "If I marry you, I shall accept all the consequences."

Wenderby bent his head.

"You do not want to answer me now?" he suggested.

"Come for my answer in twelve months."

"It is a long time."

"All my life hangs upon this decision. Twelve months is nothing at all."

"Meantime," said Wenderby, "we meet as usual."

"Of course."

"You will tell no one of this?"

"I reserve the right to tell my brother."

Wenderby rose to go. He hesitated as they stood together.

"Mary," he said, "I have talked coolly and sensibly. It was not easy. Try and believe that." His voice sank under the burden of his sincerity.

"I care with my whole soul," he added abruptly.

She met his look with understanding and compassion.

He took the hand Peter had touched and lifted it. She drew it impulsively away, giving him the other hand.

"A year from now," he said, and, kissing her fingers, went quickly from the room.

## XXXII

LADY MARY had a sense of escape. She had put off the immediate need to decide for twelve months. Almost she exulted in the time she had won. She felt she had saved for herself a year of her days and nights — a year in which to measure the issues.

Peter that afternoon had never seen her so radiant. He looked at her continually, and, when for a moment she left the room to answer a message, it seemed as if a light had gone out.

In recoil from her ordeal of the morning Lady Mary gave herself free rein. She accepted Peter's worship, and allowed the climbing current of her pleasure to flow. It seemed like the beginning of a holiday.

They talked quietly of indifferent things. Lady Mary saw that Peter's looks were openly read by his mother. Once, as Mrs. Paragon turned from his lost face to Lady Mary, a glance of intelligence passed between them.

Lady Mary kissed Mrs. Paragon at parting.

"You are not anxious about him?" she said, as Peter waited for his mother at the door.

"Peter finds his own way. I can trust him with you," said Mrs. Paragon.

In the evening, after her maid had left her, Lady



Mary sat in the firelight of her room alone with her problem. For months to come she suffered these solitary hours, looking into a future she could not read. Her duty became less clear as the days passed. She doubted the necessity of her sacrifice. Would it ultimately weigh in history? Was she justified in giving herself to a doubtful cause? In an agony of regret she saw herself turning from the virginal adoration of the boy she loved to long years of devoted work for a country that neither wanted her nor would understand.

These moods inexorably came, but at first they were few and far. In Peter's company the holiday persisted. Wenderby heard of them everywhere together. One morning, on his way to the House, he saw them in the Park. They were riding at a gallop, glowing with laughter. He stood on the path, unseen, and turned sadly away with the picture of their dancing faces firmly drawn upon his brain. He framed them in a window opposite the Treasury Bench.

Peter was already deeply committed to the routine of London. He was popular. His youth was a perpetual delight to hostesses for whom a boy of twenty-four was a precious discovery.

His readiness to enter into things eagerly and without reserve was the quaintest of pleasures to watch. It was all the more entertaining to Peter's friends owing to the rapidity with which he exhausted his ideas, emotions, hobbies, and acquaint-

ances, and the impetuosity with which he discarded them. It was his charm to be the most lovable of spendthrifts; and the charm of his desire to rush at everything as it came was enhanced for the women who welcomed him by their knowledge of his absolute integrity. He seemed to unite the energy and frank joy of a wilful libertine with the austere purity of a Galahad. Peter's was an eager, questing purity, whose adventure was watched by many of his friends with an almost passionate solicitude.

The winter drew in, and rapidly passed. Peter began to lose the edge of his enthusiasm for the new life. He soon realised that at Highbury he had found the best, and that London was inferior. It was not upon the level he had measured by Eustace Haversham. He began to be sensible of a shabby side to the frank hedonism which had at first seemed all free nature and ready fellowship. A quiet and gradual disappointment flung him the more devotedly upon Lady Mary. He was entirely happy to be her constant friend. Now that the shadow of Wenderby had passed — Wenderby hardly saw her at this time — Peter felt only an untroubled comfort in her presence. She was his particular angel, a shrine for his private adoration. The perfect symbol of his emotion at meeting her was the cool clasp of her hand.

Lady Mary was content that this should be so. She thought of Peter as of a sleeping boy, who one day, if she were free, would wake to her.

She watched him curiously, and with fear, for knowledge to stir in him. She knew that at the first flutter she would have to meet her problem with an answer.

The winter passed, and spring began warmly to enter. The lonely hours of her stress became more intolerable. Her holiday was passing, and her conscience was astir. Surely she must take Peter, or send him away. She would soon be unable to part with him.

Curiously she felt no scruples as to Peter himself — that she was betraying him into a love she might have to deny. She felt that for him it was safest to continue quietly beside her. Were she to dismiss him suddenly, it would provoke in him the storm she feared. He had come unbidden into her life, and she knew he would not leave it without a struggle.

The burden became at last too heavy. She must share it, or run for ever round in the circle of her thoughts. Upon an evening in April she heard her brother pass along the corridor as she sat in her room. She called to him.

“Tony,” she said, “I want you to know something.”

Haversham looked at her keenly. He had lately seen little of his sister or of Peter. The session had been very heavy, and the estate had also to be visited. Haversham was by more than twelve months older than he was a year ago.

“Is it Peter?” he asked quietly.

She shrank from an opening so direct.

"Not altogether," she said.

"It is partly Peter."

"Yes," she admitted.

"I saw it coming, Mary. You are only a sister of the younger branch. You can marry for yourself. You are not worrying about that?"

His quiet accepting of Peter made it harder for Lady Mary to go on. Instinctively she felt that her brother would be against her when he knew the rest. She shut her eyes and rushed at her confession.

"Lord Wenderby," she said, "asked me to marry him six months ago."

"Wenderby?"

The surprise in his voice uttered the quick leap of his mind. He came towards her. "Tell me," he said, "there is more in this than a proposal of marriage. Am I right?"

"Yes, Tony. If I marry Lord Wenderby, he will leave the Cabinet."

Haversham's eyes dangerously glittered.

"You mean," he said, "that Wenderby's political services are a wedding present?"

"He isn't sure what he ought to do. I can help him to decide."

"I see," said Haversham quietly. "Let me think of this."

He rapidly looked at the facts. He saw them clearly, in a hard, political light. Haversham had just come through a session of weary work in the

House. Temper was hardening on both sides. The Government was shaken, but its power for mischief was still incalculable. Just at this moment Wenderby's defection would recast the entire position. Haversham swept into the future, thinking only of his country. He turned back to his sister.

"Mary, darling. Can you do this?"

She looked at him with dismay. She wanted for Peter the help he was giving to Wenderby.

"You think it is my duty?" she suggested.

"It is your duty." He uttered it like a doom.

"But, Antony," she pleaded, "are you sure? Think what it means."

He hesitated a moment; then, taking her by the arms, he searched her face.

"Can you reasonably do this?" he asked.

"Reasonably?" she echoed.

"I mean, you are reasonably fond of Wenderby?"

"I trust him utterly."

"Then it is only Peter."

"Peter is my youth," she cried out, "and my right to be loved."

He felt her pain, and hated the influence he used.

"It is very difficult," he said in a low voice.

"Are the things for which we stand worth while? Surely we must think that they are."

She again felt the trap closing about her.

"How clearly you see things, Tony."

"Mary, darling, I see things as Lord Haversham. But I would to God this were not asked of you."

The words burst from him as he saw the tears gather in his sister's eyes. At the tenderness of his voice the barriers of her grief broke down. She wept in his arms, but at last drew erect.

"You are quite sure, Tony?" she asked again.

"Yes, dear."

"I will remember this talk when the time comes."

Haversham did not inquire when this time would be. He left everything now to his sister, inwardly deciding not to persuade her further.

"Meantime," he lightly suggested, "what is happening to Peter?"

"He holds me too precious to be loved, but I am afraid there will be trouble when I send him away."

"I wonder," reflected Haversham.

"I am sure of it," she insisted.

"He may surprise you yet," answered Haversham. "There is a blind side to Peter. Sometimes I think he was intended for a monk. He has a dedicated look."

"He loves me, Tony, and he will discover it."

"Cannot you spare him the knowledge?"

Lady Mary shook her head.

"Peter loved me at Highbury," she insisted.

"I shall have nothing on my conscience."

Haversham sat that night in his room in quiet

contemplation of the advice he had instinctively given to his sister. It displeased him to think how promptly and easily he had declared against the friend of his own years. He realised that a season or so ago he would not so immediately have perceived where his sister's duty lay. Was there, after all, something in Peter's ineradicable contempt for politics? Did they not rub the finer edges from a man?

Peter, after all, was his friend. He saw him with a pang, eager and impetuous; and knew how savagely his sister's marriage with Wenderby would tear him. There was nothing tangibly ignoble — nothing that a man of worldly years would boggle at — in Wenderby's proposal to Lady Mary. Nevertheless Haversham realised that young Marbury twelve months ago would have recoiled with a faint disgust from this attempt upon his sister. Undoubtedly he had changed. A year of politics, of arrangements and compromises, of difficult dealings with men of many tempers and desires, had caused young Marbury to seem like a legend, remote and debonair, to thoughtful Haversham. He had, almost without thinking, thrown over his friend, perceived the wisdom of his sister's great alliance, and quite overlooked the faint soil in Wenderby of a finesse which a year ago would rudely have jarred him.

Haversham smiled a little bitterly into the fire as he thought of these things — and the smile deepened as he realised that, though on reflection

he could see the pity of it, and even hope that youth might even now defeat them all, nevertheless he could himself only repeat his first advice and conduct. He would on all occasions repeat that Wenderby was a man of perfect honour, even though he understood the impulsive dislike and distrust of Peter. He would continue to insist that the mere claims of youth were not enough to defeat the splendid political vision this marriage had offered to their eyes.

Meantime to ease the pricking of his conscience in regard to Peter he assured himself that Peter was far too young to be really in love with anybody — with Mary least of all.



### XXXIII

FROM that hour Lady Mary began to face the future as a creditor. Her coming days with Peter were numbered and enjoyed as the reward of her sacrifice.

Yet another month slipped away. The year was now at the full of the first green, and London roared at the height of the season. Peter began to be much oppressed with the social rush. Much of it he now saw as mere noise and hurry. He read steadily in the morning, for he still intended seriously to be called to the Bar. In the afternoon he rode or went for long solitary journeys on the river. An evening seldom passed without meeting Lady Mary. They frankly exchanged plans, and schemed for snatches of conversation in crowded places.

At this time they were opportunely invited to leave the hurry of London for a few days in Norfolk. A friend of Haversham had got together at Wroxham a fleet of wherries. Peter and Lady Mary joined the same boat for their last unclouded days together. Only Lady Mary knew how precious and irrevocable they were. For Peter they were slow days of agreeable idleness, as they glided from reach to reach of the quietest country in the world. Always there was the same circle of sky, with an idle mill and rows of grey-green

sedges; the quiet lapping of water and plod of the quanting. Tiny villages dropped past them, with square towers and clusters of small buildings.

Upon the third evening of the cruise, Lady Mary picked up some London letters at Potter Heigham. One was from Lord Wenderby. She opened it and read:

“LADY MARY,— I hope you will not regard this as a breach of our contract. Things are moving quickly in the Cabinet. I must decide at once to stay or go. I can wait for you six days. If you cannot now help me to break with my ties and interests of the moment I must put away our vision of the future.

“I saw you in the Park the other day. I cannot hope you will ever be my wife. Believe that I wish you all the happiness of your heart.

“WENDERBY.”

Lady Mary answered at once. She told Wenderby to come for his answer on her return to London. Meantime, if he needed to know her mind, let him believe all that he wished.

Now she had only two days. She decided to tell Peter in London when they returned. Here she would part from him without a destroying word.

The last evening of the cruise was warm with a breeze from the land to the sea, enough for sailing. Peter and Lady Mary sat, after an early dinner, together on deck. Laughter came from the drawing-room below — a London drawing-

room planted in a wilderness of marsh and water. Sunset was burning itself out. Light was flung upon miles of water, making of the country about them a glimmering palette. The mill on the horizon was derelict, standing black and crude, an eyeless giant, blind to the colour of earth and sky.

Merriment swelled below them. A clever musician parodied the latest phase of a modern French composer.

"This," said Peter with a sardonic gesture at the people below, "is a return to Nature."

"You are more scathing than you know," answered Lady Mary with a smile. "You are listening to a burlesque of the latest thing in music, written in the scale of the Opopo islanders. The Opopo islanders can only count up to five. We are determined to be primitive."

"I should like to sail away into all that," said Peter, waving his arm vaguely at the sunset.

Lady Mary caught at the idea.

"Can you sail?" she asked.

"Pretty fair," said Peter.

"Then why not?"

Lady Mary pointed to the dinghy beneath them. The mast was shipped, and the sail folded.

"Will you come?" asked Peter.

"It is our last evening."

Peter did not hear the sorrow of her phrase.

"Our last evening of the simple life," he laughed. He climbed down, and held the ladder firm.

“How are you for wraps?” he called. “It is going to be colder later. This breeze will freshen.”

Lady Mary smiled at his expert way.

“Where,” she inquired, “did you learn all this?”

“I learned it with Antony. We did this sort of thing at Oxford.”

The reference to her brother brought Lady Mary again in view of her sacrifice. She shivered and was silent as Peter rowed softly out into the stream, and spread the tiny sail. The breeze caught it, and the little boat leaned over, hesitated, and swung quickly across the river. The air freshened upon their faces. They dropped almost in a moment away from the lighted flat, and soon were alone, speeding at ease over the beautiful water.

“Why didn’t we think of this before?” said Peter happily. He pushed over the tiller. The little boat turned, and the water chuckled under her bows.

“Let me take you into the open. The breeze is beginning to be stiff for this tiny boat; but we can always lower sail if it gets too rough.”

“Anything to-night,” said Lady Mary.

“I love to hear you say that,” Peter sang.

They passed into a wide lake, and were soon far from the shore, which showed now as a dark line picked out here and there with light.

“Anything to-night,” Peter echoed the phrase.

"It sounds," he went on, "as if the present mattered more than anything in the world."

The breeze was stronger as they neared the middle of the water. The boat heeled dangerously.

"We've too much canvas for a tub," said Peter. He lowered the sail, and found he could take in a tiny reef. The hurry of the little boat was stilled. It swung idly on the water, and the wind seemed to have left them. Peter was busy with the sail, and Lady Mary sat still as a statue opposite him, her hand on the side of the boat. His happy face was intolerable. How would he take the news which waited for him at home? He was ready now to swing the reefed sail to the mast, but she impulsively stopped him.

"Don't do that," she said abruptly.

"The boat will stand it," Peter protested.

"It's not that," said Lady Mary. "Let us stay a while in this open place."

Her tone arrested him. It was urgent and entreating. He dropped the sail into the boat, and they sat silent for a time. Lady Mary was blaming her weakness. Why did she not at once signal for that brief run over the little span of water between them and the fleet? It would take her to the duty she had accepted. Her holiday was finished.

Peter misread the entreaty in her voice.

"You do not want to go back?" he said.

"Not at once."

"You, too, find all that less inspiring than it seems?" He waved his hand towards the people they had left.

"This is better, for a time," she answered evasively.

"You still believe in all that?" He looked towards the lighted masts, his face troubled and perplexed.

"Of course I believe," she assured him.

Peter eagerly bent forward. "You remember," he said softly, "a night upon the terrace at Highbury?"

Lady Mary looked at him, terror waiting to spring at her heart.

"I hardly know," Peter continued, "whether I still believe all that I believed at Highbury. It is all too insolent, and some of it is foolish and cruel. I have seen ugly and brutal things. I am beginning to see that there are no classes. Rank is nothing at all. There are only people."

Why did he talk like that to-night? It was intolerable.

"You are wrong," she cried out. "Wealth is nothing, and there are bad shoots in an old tree. But there are men and women who must think and rule. It is their right."

"That may be only your beautiful dream."

"Peter," she called distressfully, "you don't know what you are saying."

He looked at her in wonder at the veiled agony of her voice. The pure white line of her face

showed like stone in the shutting light. There was a short silence. Then Lady Mary spoke again:

“I want you to suppose something,” she said urgently. “It is possible that I may be asked to make a sacrifice for this belief of mine. It will be painful for me and for my dearest friend.”

“Nothing in the world is worth a moment of your pain.”

Peter's sincerity redeemed from ridicule the tragic untimeliness of his dithyrambic assurance. Lady Mary was brought nearer to tears than to laughter.

“Not even my faith?” she protested.

“It would be an evil faith, or it would not make you suffer.”

“Why do you put me so high?” Again there was a note of stress.

“I shall always do that.”

He put his hand firmly upon hers that rested on the side of the boat. She held her breath, fighting the desperate flutter of her soul. When she dared to look at him, she still met the shining worship of a boy. His hand rested upon hers, temperate and cool. She was glad she had not trembled or drawn away. Peter felt only an exquisite sense of privilege. He sat with bright eyes, happy in her beautiful austerity. She triumphed over her thrilled senses, and in her triumph faced him carven and tense.

The light faded rapidly. Colour went out of

the sky and the water. Lady Mary took a long farewell of Peter's adoration. She knew that the light in his eyes was soon to be put out.

At last, with a deep sigh, her hand still quietly held, she said:

"Now, Peter, we must go. We have no light in the boat."

He reluctantly made ready the sail. The breeze caught it rudely. Their dream was broken up with the noise of water and wind. They came within sight and sound of the river. Peter lowered the sail to row in to the side of their wherry. There was only a moment now.

Lady Mary caught at Peter's wrist upon the oars.

"You will believe in me always, Peter?"

"Always."

"My life may take me away from you," she desperately urged. "We read things differently."

A burst of laughter came from the deck of the wherry. Lady Mary withdrew her hand from Peter's wrist.

"Nothing in the world can shake my belief in you," said Peter, still pausing on the oars.

"That is easily said."

Lady Mary cried out in pain at the light heart of the boy she loved.

"I mean it in every fibre," Peter insisted. "I am utterly yours."

"Row in to the boat," said Lady Mary. "This is the end."



## XXXIV

PETER and Lady Mary travelled up to London next morning in the same train. They separated at Arlington Street, and she asked him to come and see her on the evening of the following day. Peter lightly promised, and happily left her.

Late in the day he sat with his mother in Curzon Street with open windows, idle and reminiscent. His talk in the boat with Lady Mary had emphasized his impressions of the life he was leading. It was not all wise and beautiful. His absurd enthusiasm had again been mocked. He measured what he had saved from the wreck of his expectations. The people with whom he now was living were more frank and free than any he had known. They were on the whole without fear. They feared neither men, nor words, nor the satisfaction of their heart's desire. But he had not found, and would not find, Eustace Haversham repeated.

He considered Lady Mary. Was not the world justified in that it put her high above fear and calculation, bidding her be queenly and untroubled? Peter tried to see her snatched from her world of policy and grace. Might she not show fairer yet, seen apart from the things for which she stood?

Last night she had seemed like a creature with wings caught and held. How would they fare, those beating wings, if the common round too obstinately claimed her? Jealousy caught at Peter — the jealousy he had felt years ago when he saw a woman of the street pass to her desecration.

“How much do I love her?” he asked, prompted by the pain at his heart.

He loved her as far as the clasping of hands and his privileged admission to regard closely her perfection. His passion was a strong resolve that she should purely stand to be adored, not familiar, too delicate to catch at rudely for a possession.

His thoughts were shattered by a screaming in the street. Something extraordinary had happened. Peter moved to the window, and saw a newsboy rushing down from Piccadilly. Servants hurried from the doors, and bought the papers as he came. Peter at last heard the news, and saw the big black letters of the boy's fluttering bill. Wenderby had resigned. Peter turned impatiently away. These politics did not touch him.

But London was clearly interested. Next morning the papers were heavy with this great event. It stared at Peter from every corner of the street. Peter did not trouble to read the excited press. Since Wenderby had ceased to cloud the presence of his angel Peter had not regarded him. Frequently he paused that morning in his quiet reading of the law, but he paused to think only of an evening with Lady Mary.

Lady Mary was with Wenderby at that moment in her drawing-room at Arlington Street.

"I am pledged to you, Lord Wenderby," she was saying; and he answered:

"You talk like a creditor."

"Are you not a creditor?" she insisted. "You have put me beyond remedy into your debt."

"My resignation had to come last night, or not at all," he explained. "I was not trying to force you."

She measured him with a look, deliberate and frank.

"If I thought you were trying to force me," she said, "I should not be listening to you now. Your debt will be paid in full. But you must give me time. There are things you must allow me to forget."

Wenderby rose to go. He held her hand at parting, and hesitated a moment. The settled sadness of her manner showed him that she was looking back; showed him also that she had faced the future, and would not weakly remember things she must put away.

"Mary," he said, "if you cannot reasonably go through with this, remember that I resigned last night for the chance of you. It was only a chance."

"It was a safe chance," she answered quickly; "a chance that depended on my honour."

Wenderby gratefully accepted her decision. He became practical.

“How would you have it arranged?” he asked. “I mean the formal part of it.”

“We must meet, and be publicly seen. The engagement—shall we say three months from now?”

Her sobriety misgave him. He began to realise the extent of her sacrifice. Had he pressed her unfairly?

“You are sure you can go on with this?” he urgently asked, again opening a way of retreat.

“Quite sure,” she firmly answered. “I cannot yet be glad of this event; but I shouldn’t undertake to be your wife if I did not think I was able to keep faith. I shall join you gladly, and without reserve.”

Wenderby bent his head.

“I don’t think you will regret this,” he said with deep emotion. “Everything I have is now devoted to you and the things which are dear to you. But I won’t urge personal feeling on you now.”

He pressed her hand in a quick and friendly farewell. In another moment she was alone, able to think of her coming interview with Peter. She had begun to dread this so keenly that in a fit of shrinking she had almost written to him. She feared to see his pain, and trembled for its effect upon herself.

Peter’s invitation was for dinner at Arlington Street. Shortly before he came Lady Mary talked with her brother. He had just arrived in town,

brought by Wenderby's resignation. He at once looked for his sister.

They greeted in the drawing-room shortly before dinner.

"This is great news," he began. "I came up from Yorkshire with the Chief Whip. He thinks we shall turn them out." He paused, and looked closely at his sister.

"I am very proud of you, Mary," he went on. "You have accepted the work of your life."

Lady Mary had lately seen little of Haversham. His work began utterly to absorb him. She put her hand on his arm.

"Tony," she said, "I sometimes wonder if I'm not losing a brother."

"Mary, dear," he protested, "you are more than ever precious to me now."

Lady Mary sadly shook her head.

"Your first word to me was of the Chief Whip," she reminded him.

Haversham was touched. He put his hand gently on his sister's arm.

"We do not belong to ourselves," he pleaded. "This act of yours is a public thing."

"I have a personal thing still left to do," she said. "Peter is coming to-night. You must leave him with me."

"That will be easy," he assured her. "They're all political people this evening. We shall go on afterwards to the House."

The talk at dinner was all of Wenderby's resig-

nation. The division that night would show the strength of his following. Peter was exasperated by the persistence with which this event pursued him.

"Is this resignation really important?" he asked in an early pause of the conversation. Lady Mary had left her seat at the foot of the table.

"Important!" his neighbour exclaimed at him. "Why, it's the most important event in politics for fifty years. It changes everything."

"This, Peter, is not one of those important things which happen every day," said Haversham quietly. "I would have given almost anything to bring this about."

"At any rate, Haversham," said one of the politicians, "you have helped it a little."

"I'm afraid not."

"Just a little, I think," the politician insisted. "Your friendship with Wenderby must have counted. These personal things do weigh. Wenderby was not very comfortable with his late friends."

"Lord Wenderby's change of party, I suppose, is final?" Peter politely suggested.

"Quite," said Haversham curtly.

"He'll certainly stay with us," chuckled Peter's neighbour. "We shall make it worth while."

"There's less competition on our side," said another. "We haven't any brains under sixty-five."

“Moreover,” said Haversham incisively, “Wenderby is a man of honour.”

“Has that anything to do with it?” Peter must somehow persist in his hostility. He could only think of Wenderby as an adventurer. Haversham lifted a finger at him:

“Peter,” he said, “we shall quarrel if you cannot help being rude to one of my best friends. You must believe in Wenderby. You don’t know how essential it is.”

They broke up, and prepared to leave for the House. Haversham told Peter he would find Lady Mary in her drawing-room. Peter went happily to discover her. He had seen her room only once before. He remembered with pleasure how exquisitely it framed her.

## XXXV

THE servants were removing the coffee as he came in, and Lady Mary was softly at the piano. She continued her music after they were alone, Peter watching her in a light soft as the blurred harmonies of her playing. She had never seemed so elusive. At last she abruptly turned.

“What would you do, Peter, if this were our last evening together?”

Peter was surprised at her sudden question. He took it seriously, and thought a little.

“I should sit quietly here,” he said at last, “and learn you by heart.”

“But you would want to talk,” she protested.

“There has been talking enough.”

She had come from the piano, and now sat near him upon a low chair. The silence deepened as she hunted for an opening. Then suddenly she uttered her secret thought:

“I wonder how much you love me, Peter?”

Peter did not in words answer her quiet speculation. He dropped softly beside her on the rug, putting his free hand between hers. There calmly it lay upon her lap as he looked at the fire. The minutes passed till Lady Mary found them intolerable. Her hands closed tightly upon his.



“Peter, dear,” she whispered.

Peter turned slowly towards her, startled by the stress of her voice, startled yet more when he found it in her eyes.

“You are in trouble?”

“I have something to tell you,” she said.

“About yourself?”

Lady Mary bent her head.

“You remember,” she went on, “our evening on the water?”

“I shall not forget it.”

“I said then that the time might come when I should be drawn away from you.”

“That is impossible,” he protested. “I cannot lose you. I shall always know that you are wonderful.”

“Will you always think of me like that?” she mournfully wondered.

“You are sacred,” said Peter simply. He bent to kiss her fingers, but she drew them sharply back.

“No, Peter,” she cried in pain; “I have given your hand away.”

Peter stared at her.

“Do you mean,” he slowly asked, “that I have no share in you at all?”

“Tell me”—she spoke in a low voice, and her eyes were veiled—“will you hold me sacred”—she shyly quoted his word—“as the wife of another man?”

Peter struggled with this new idea. It raised in him a bitter confusion. His calm devotion was

shaken and stirred. Above it triumphed a sense of loss, an instinct to grasp at something threatened.

"You are pledged?" he abruptly asked.

"Yes, Peter." It came from her like a confession.

The idea was now being driven into his brain. He looked at Lady Mary as he had not looked before. She sat back in her chair, turning aside from him. With opened eyes, he saw now the beauty of a woman snatched away. He leant towards her, uttering one hungry syllable:

"Who?"

It was the first time Peter's voice had challenged her. The adoration had gone out of it. It was hard.

"Does it matter?" she protested.

"It is a secret, then?" he coldly asked.

"No; I have promised to marry Lord Wenderby."

"Lord Wenderby," he echoed.

The name tore savagely at his heart, wounding him into jealousy and distrust. He was all blind passion now. Wenderby sprang to his eye, as he had stood darkly beside Lady Mary at the theatre. He saw, redly, in his galloping mind, his shining angel — now a beautiful woman he had exquisitely touched — possessed by another.

"Turn to me, Lady Mary."

It was a command, and she obeyed. She bravely

met his burning look, but she did not know how unendurable it had become. It searched and denounced her. Her eyes failed.

“You do not love Lord Wenderby.”

Now he accused her. She collected her mind for a defence.

“It is not so simple as that,” she pleaded.

“You do not love him,” he repeated.

She drew herself erect and faced him.

“You must not speak like that,” she said.

“You are talking wildly. I tell you again this is not a simple thing.”

“Love is a simple thing,” he rudely countered.

“You are disappointing me, Peter.”

The pain in her eyes for a moment arrested his passion. He stood away from her, and grasped at his vanishing peace. Lady Mary perceived his effort, and appealed once more to the boy who had so suddenly leaped out of her knowledge.

“You will listen to me, Peter!” she urged.

He stood silently waiting to hear what she had to say. She spoke quickly, running from the breaking storm in his eyes:

“I am quite content to be the wife of Lord Wenderby. I have always liked him and admired him. Six months ago he asked me if I would help him to join us politically. I have used my influence to bring him over. This pledges me to work with him.”

“Does it pledge you to be his wife?”

"That is understood."

"So Lord Wenderby has been bribed," Peter flashed.

He looked at her cold and hostile. His thwarted pride of possession in Lady Mary stirred a cruelty he had never known.

Between love and anger she cried to him:

"This is not worthy of you, Peter."

But Peter's mind was busy now elsewhere. He was putting time and fact together.

"Lord Wenderby arranged for this six months ago," he suggested.

"He asked me to be his wife six months ago."

Now he stabbed at her again:

"You have let me love the promised wife of Lord Wenderby for six months."

"No," she sharply corrected him; "I answered him yesterday."

"But you had this in your mind?" Peter insisted.

Lady Mary was too deeply grieved for dignity or anger.

"I am on my defence, it seems," she said, suddenly weary of their fruitless talk.

"You have made me your judge," he bitterly retorted. "Why else do you tell me these things?"

"I wanted you to understand."

"I shall never understand."

Lady Mary looked at Peter, and saw the face of an enemy.

"We will put an end to this," she said. "It is useless."

She moved to dismiss him. Peter saw her passing to another.

He took her by the arm, harshly.

"You cannot so easily be rid of me."

"I do not know you, Peter," she protested, drawing away from him.

He released her as to the troubled surface of his mind there came an impulse of his old devotion.

"How can you do this thing?" he asked in a burst of grief. "You were the angel of my life."

Her pride sank at this.

"Peter, be just to me," she said. "This is a sacrifice."

He caught at the word, and returned to his old refrain.

"Sacrifice! You do not love Lord Wenderby."

"I shall be his wife. I am content to work with him."

"Lord Wenderby is old," said Peter brutally.

"He has bribed you to give him all your beautiful years."

She shrank from the climbing rhetoric of his passion.

"It is infamous," he almost shouted.

Lady Mary flung back the challenge.

"It is my appointed work. I shall work with Lord Wenderby for all I hold dear. I am going to live as Eustace Haversham died. Cannot you realise that this is required of me? I cannot

choose only for myself. You must understand me, Peter. I can only endure this if you will believe that I am doing what is right."

Peter was obstinate.

"I do not believe it," he said. "It is a terrible mistake."

"Once you believed," she reminded him.

"I believed in you."

She faced him, queenly now, as when Peter had worshipped her. His soul fell suddenly at her feet.

"I still believe in you," he cried out. "I believe that you are too dear to be flung away."

"I cannot value myself as you do."

"You are giving yourself up," he said contemptuously, "so that your people for a few more years may live as we are living now."

"So that we may for a few more years be allowed to work as we must," she corrected him.

Peter was silent. He had seen her justification, but his passion prompted him to put it away. Lady Mary now touched him to the quick.

"You begin to see that I am right," she said, searching for his acquiescence.

"I see nothing," he insisted. "I only see that I am losing you."

"You make this very difficult," she said, trembling before the passion of his voice.

"Difficult!" He caught her by the arm. "Why should you care what I say or believe?"

She looked at his fingers imprinted in her flesh.

She was weary and faint. She knew that love without reserve was confessed in her eyes.

"You know that I care, Peter. Please let me go."

Peter leaned towards her. He wanted to see her face. She felt that in a moment she must yield the message shut under her lids. She desperately shook free of him and stood away. But Peter read the deep flush of her neck and the motion she made to suppress the labour of her breath. She superbly filled his eyes against a background that had grown dim. He caught at her.

"My darling," he suddenly cried out, "I cannot let you go."

She felt the blood rushing to cover her.

"On your honour, Peter."

For a moment he was checked. "Tell me again to leave you," he said.

She faced him, and her eyes were fast held. He read the whole of her secret. In a flash his arms were about her.

"You cannot tell me to go."

She rested helplessly. Peter held her with a fierce pride. He would not surrender her. She closed her eyes upon a whispered entreaty as he touched her lips. He felt the stir of her heart, and the jealousy of possession utterly claimed him. Something wild and cruel lit in him. He kissed her upon the face and neck. She felt them as the kisses of mere hunger, and she suddenly rebelled.

"Peter, you dishonour me." Her voice smote

into him a revelation. Already the passion had gone out of him. It had died in the act of touching her. He knew what he had done; he was utterly ashamed. His arms fell away from her. He stood with bent head waiting for her decree.

“ I will write to you, Peter.”

He accepted his dismissal, turning without a word. Lady Mary heard that the door had closed. She stood silently for a moment. Then, all that evening, she lay back in her chair stone still. Her eyes were tight shut; but at long intervals a tear was forced from under her lids, and fell insensibly.



## XXXVI

PETER blundered away into the streets, an outcast. He walked furiously about, getting in the way of people who looked for pleasure.

He lived again the late encounter. Remotely he saw himself quietly at the feet of Lady Mary, before he had lost his happy peace. Then the storm was loose, and he saw her merely as one to be desired and held. Finally, his imagination inexorably came full circle in the cold shame with which he had left her. He repeated continually the moment when his kisses had gone out, and he knew them for the vulgar gust of his jealousy. Their passion had not been true. Lady Mary had cried in bitter verity. They dishonoured her.

Was all the story equally a falsehood? Peter dipped for assurance back into the quiet past. He floated again with Lady Mary under a dying sky, and saw her unattainably fair, with a hand that quietly rested under his. Surely this had been wonderful. Not even the stain of his brutal hunger for her dedicated beauty could destroy it.

Why, then, did he so certainly know that his passion to-night was evil? His conscience, bringing him to a reckoning, told him that he did not love her. There was a rift, not to be closed, between his adoration of Lady Mary and the passion with which he had thought to claim her. He put

Wenderby aside, and asked himself whether he could ever have taken her by right of a vital need. His imagination would not allow him to do so. He could only see himself for ever kneeling, or delicately touching her as an exquisite privilege. He could not again repeat the physical claim. Mere coveting had prompted it. The soul had perished on his lips.

How instantly she had read the quality of his act. Every beat of the quick moment of his taking her was minutely divided in his memory. He felt again her surrender, her expectation of the kiss she could not deny — the farewell moment of her youth to be expiated in years of sacrifice. Then suddenly she had rebelled, feeling the soul go out of him, protesting against her dishonour.

Peter quailed to think how he had tortured her. He knew now that Lady Mary loved him. She had been outraged where most she was virginal.

For a moment Peter caught at a hope that yet the mysterious rift might close between the soul and body of his love. Must he always be thus divided? Was he never to know a perfect passion where the blood ran in obedient rapture to celebrate the meeting of two in one? He remembered the beautiful girl he had tracked on a summer night, to shrink from taking her because his spirit was her enemy. Now that he in spirit loved Lady Mary — he insistently fought through to-day's murk back to his adoration — he was still divided. His moment of hope died out. He had no right

to Lady Mary. He could not passionately claim her. His passion would fail again, as to-night it had failed, leaving only the senses to be fed.

He did not love her. Brutally it came to that. Lady Mary must take the way she had herself appointed. She could not be asked to put away the work of her life in return for a worship that fed upon the air, or for a hunger that seized on a vanishing feast. Himself he felt entirely in her hands. He hoped to be forgiven, and accepted as the witness of her dedicated life. But he did not expect it, or make a claim.

He reached Curzon Street at ten o'clock, and found his mother returned from dining out. Mrs. Paragon now had her own friends. She quietly came and went, usually not asking how Peter fared. All his time was taken up with Lady Mary, and with Lady Mary she left the issue in perfect trust. But to-night she was startled from her assurance. Peter, unaware that he betrayed himself, had the face of a soul newly admitted to damnation.

"What has happened to you, Peter?" she asked.

"Nothing, mother."

She came to him where he had flung himself into a chair beside the fire.

"Has Lady Mary sent you away?"

Peter stared at her in amazement. He had never talked of Lady Mary. But he always accepted his mother's mysterious knowledge.

"She is soon to be married, mother."

“Lord Wenderby?”

This was more than Peter could accept.

“You know that also?” he exclaimed.

“I saw Lord Wenderby one day in these rooms,” said his mother quietly. “I knew he was in love with Lady Mary.”

Peter looked keenly at his mother.

“You are sure he loves her?” he asked.

“Quite.”

“I should be happy to believe that. It gives him a better claim.”

“Better than your own?” said his mother. She was at last surprised.

“I have no claim at all. I do not love Lady Mary.”

He was quaintly wretched. His mother almost smiled. She saw a light in the cloud, but it puzzled her. Would he then have preferred to love Lady Mary and to lose her?

“Tell me what has happened,” she said. “I don’t understand. You do not love Lady Mary — is that your trouble?”

“She told me of Lord Wenderby,” Peter obediently answered, “and I was mad at the idea of losing her. I grasped at her. I was like a wild beast.”

“But you do not love her,” Mrs. Paragon persisted.

“It was not love made me behave like that. It was brutal. I had no true passion at all. I disgusted her.”

Mrs. Paragon suddenly rose.

"What has Lady Mary said? How did she part from you?"

Peter looked at her in wonder. What was his mother going to do now?

"She said she would write," he answered. "Her eyes were closed."

Mrs. Paragon saw that this was not Peter's tragedy. She could leave him to his remorse.

"Give me my cloak, Peter."

"Where are you going?"

Mrs. Paragon ignored his question.

"What is Lady Mary doing now?" she asked.

"She promised to wait for Antony. The division to-night is at eleven o'clock."

Mrs. Paragon looked at the clock.

"It is now half-past ten. Call me a cab, Peter."

"You are going to her?"

"Of course."

On the way to Arlington Street Mrs. Paragon saw the radiant figure of the woman, to whom she had trusted Peter, in dreadful eclipse. She passed without a word Lady Mary's protesting servant, and went directly to her room. Lady Mary still lay with closed eyes where she had been struck down. Mrs. Paragon moved quietly towards her, and gathered her like a child. She opened her eyes, accepting Peter's mother with a clasp of the hand.

"You have seen Peter?" she quietly asked.

"He has just come home. He says he has for ever offended you."

Lady Mary smiled.

"I will send him a word to-night," she said. "I have just been trying to understand. I think I shall soon be happy. I know now that Peter does not love me. That makes it so much easier."

"He worships you," Mrs. Paragon insisted.

"Can that be restored?"

"More than ever now. I am sure he would want me to tell you that."

Lady Mary raised herself from Mrs. Paragon's shoulder and looked at her.

"I cannot yet measure this breach in Peter. He has loved me from the moment we came together at Highbury. But to-night I was humbled. There was no love at all. I cannot now believe that Peter will ever truly love. There is a rift."

"You are wrong," said Peter's mother.

Mrs. Paragon told Lady Mary how lately she had watched beside him as he wandered in an empty house. Lady Mary heard the story of Miranda.

"I think he is wandering still," concluded Peter's mother.

"You should have found this girl," said Lady Mary.

Mrs. Paragon paused a moment.

"I have tried," she said at last.

"Can't she be traced?"

"You remember the great liner that went down

four years ago? She was not on the list of people saved."

"When did you discover this?"

"I inquired shortly after Peter's illness."

Lady Mary thought a little.

"Perhaps it is better so," she said after a pause.

"Why do you say that?"

"Peter has surely grown away from these people. He would not have found his dream."

A shutting door warned Lady Mary that her brother had returned. She rose from the settee, and went to the writing table. When she had finished her few lines, she gave them to Mrs. Paragon, who, asking Lady Mary with a look, was invited to read them:

"PETER,— I beg you not to distress yourself. I am determined to forget what happened this evening, and I rely on you not to brood on things which are finished. You know now that I am more than ever right to become the wife of Lord Wenderby. I want you to meet me without awkwardness or self-reproach. There is no need for one or the other. Nothing has changed.

"I am sending this by your dear mother.

"MARY."

Mrs. Paragon handed back the sheet.

"You are kind," she said.

"I have nothing to resent."

She sealed the letter, and addressed it. "When

Peter has got over his remorse, you will bring him back," she suggested.

"His remorse is too keen to last," Mrs. Paragon said quite simply. She did not intend to be critical.

Lady Mary kissed Mrs. Paragon tenderly.

"It was beautiful of you to come," she whispered.

Peter was waiting for his mother, and met her anxiously at the door. Lady Mary's letter acted as she intended. It was a dash of water upon the fires of his despair. Reading her collected sentences, he could hardly believe he had seen love and pain unutterable in her eyes. She was, in her letter, restored to serenity as one to be remotely worshipped. An added majesty had crowned her. She was dedicated to a great historic part. Already as Mrs. Paragon returned, the news was spread from waiting presses that the Government had fallen. They screamed it in the street below. Now that his personal passion was out of the way, Peter began to see these issues in a large and national perspective. He remembered Haversham's vibrant wish that he might have had some share in this event—the event of which Lady Mary was motive and queen.

Peter's recovery was rapid. Alternately the week through he wavered between the remorse of one who had erred unspeakably and the exultation of one still privileged to witness the flight of an angel. Then, one bright morning, he dis-



covered that these extremes had vanished in a quiet sense, that a chapter of his life had closed. Rapture was going out of his late adventure, making way for a steady sense that Lady Mary was very admirable and an excellent friend.

After a few days spent mostly with his mother, he was enough in tune with Lady Mary's letter to visit her in Arlington Street. Wenderby was waiting for her, and, before she came down to them, they were a few moments together. Peter was surprised at the cordiality of his feelings for the man he had so long distrusted. Wenderby had an instinct for meeting people in their own way. He at once saw the change in Peter.

"I think you know of my engagement?" he said abruptly.

"Has Lady Mary told you everything?" Peter asked.

"Not everything," Wenderby answered with a faint smile. "I have inferred the greater part."

"You will be very proud of her," said Peter impulsively.

"You believe that I understand my good fortune?"

Lady Mary came in as they spoke. Peter was astonished at the ease with which they talked together of small things. He tranquilly withdrew at the end of a few moments. Lady Mary was frank and free. She seemed entirely at peace. There had not been a sign of effort in her friendly greeting.

## XXXVII

IN the following months Peter realised to what extent his late devotion to Lady Mary had filled him. Now that she was only one of his best friends, he was at first vacant of enthusiasm. Then he began to discover all kinds of neglected ties with people whom before he had hardly noticed. Ostensibly Lady Mary was still supreme, but, curiously as it seemed to Peter, though her sacrifice and the wonder of her great career set her higher in his admiration, it had made this admiration less tremulously personal. The ecstasy had gone out of it. It no longer shut out the undistinguished world. He discovered now that he had other friends; that he was liked by some of them; that their liking was gratifying and merited some small return.

Since Haversham had been claimed by his public and hereditary life, Peter had become attached to a frequent visitor at Arlington Street.

James Atterbury was a young and successful caricaturist who had also written and produced several plays. His activities were financially unnecessary, so that in a sense he was an amateur. He was socially popular, and Peter met him everywhere. Gradually he had taken Haversham's place. Like Haversham, he was tolerant and ur-

bane. He had long abandoned those visions which now were driving Peter restlessly from day to day. He was a cheerful man of pleasure, living for all that was agreeable and could be decently enjoyed. He had watched, with respectful irony, Peter's absorbed devotion to Lady Mary, and had keenly speculated as to how it would end. When the end came, Haversham plainly hinted that Atterbury would do well to help Peter recover an early interest in people and things.

"Certainly," Atterbury had said. "I'm rehearsing a new play at the Vaudeville. Peter shall attend."

"Is that adequate, do you think?"

"Yes, Tony. Rehearsing a play is the most distracting thing in the world."

So Peter, plunged into a new atmosphere, sat for hours upon the small stage at the Vaudeville watching, with growing interest and amusement, the pulling together of a mixed company.

"It's like a children's party," Atterbury told him. "At present we are a little shy, but soon it will be a bear-garden. They will forget that I am the author, to be loved and respected. By the time we are ready for the public, I shan't be on speaking terms with anybody."

"Except Vivette," suggested Peter, looking towards Atterbury's principal lady.

"You've noticed Vivette?"

"I've noticed you always give way to her."

"Not always."

"Usually, then."

"Usually she is right. She is really improving my play."

Peter looked with greater interest at the vivacious young woman now holding the stage. She was full of vitality, which somehow she shared with all who acted with her. As soon as she left the stage, life went out of the performance.

"What is her name?" Peter asked.

"Formally you may call her Mademoiselle Claire."

"French?"

"Every country in the world."

At this point the rehearsal again became animated. Atterbury was soon fighting to be heard. The dispute was at last arranged, and he returned to Peter.

"Vivette has been looking at you, Peter," he said as the play began to go smoothly again.

"How do you know?"

"Because she has told me."

"What did she say?"

"She asked for the name of my solemn friend."

"Anybody looks solemn beside you," Peter grumbled.

He resentfully examined his companion. Atterbury was roseate and sanguine; but he looked at Peter as gravely as he could.

"I hope you are not hankering after the admiration of Vivette," he said. "She isn't safe."

"What do you mean?" asked Peter.

"She looks upon everything nice in life as a sort of sugar-plum. If she likes you, Peter, she will eat you."

"You mean she is a wicked woman?"

"Not at all," twinkled Atterbury. "I mean she is a small child who happens to be greedy. She would think no more harm of making a hearty meal of your ingenuous self than I should of swallowing an oyster."

Vivette slipped from the imaginary door of a room that did not exist — they were rehearsing without scenery — and came to them before they were aware.

"You have shocked your friend," she said to Atterbury, looking at Peter. Peter angrily composed his protesting face, as Atterbury presented him.

"Peter Paragon is easily shocked," Atterbury said. "I hope you did not hear what we were talking about?"

"No."

"It was harmless," Atterbury assured her.

"Do tell me," she pleaded. "I don't often hear anything harmless."

"Impossible."

"Wasn't it to do with oysters? Let's go to lunch. We shan't make any way this morning."

They lunched together. It was an agreeable triangle; but Atterbury, with amusement, saw he would soon be unnecessary. Peter, in reaction from the emotional strain of his last adventure,

found in Vivette a pleasant holiday. Peter consented with Vivette to relieve the dignity and stress of life upon the heroic plane. He came to delight in the quick gleam of her eyes.

The eyes of Vivette were brown, easily lighting, but shallow. They flickered into fun, and went suddenly out. They could never be passionate or deep, but they talked with him, and drew him to admire the play of her lips, slightly full, the life and light of her face; the sudden tale of her blood which came and went at a word or gesture.

She did everything with an equal enthusiasm. She had the mimic soul to catch at every mood. She was born a player. Life was a quick succession of happy parts. She stepped from her rôle on the stage into the rôle she happened to be playing in the world.

Soon she was playing the happy comrade of Peter. He soon attended rehearsals regularly without prompting from Atterbury, and Atterbury usually made excuses to send them away to a friendly lunch. Atterbury was unable to resist the comedy of seeing them together. They inspired the most famously cruel of his social caricatures. Peter looked forlornly innocent beside her. Cytherea's Pilgrim, Atterbury named him. His simplicity and perpetual fervour aggravated the lightness of Vivette. In Atterbury's penetrating eye, each made a caricature of the other. It was a sense of this which threw them more and more

closely together. Each was determined to touch the other and to make a proselyte. Peter wanted to be taken seriously by Vivette. Vivette wanted to see Peter come down from his golden throne.

Peter watched the first performance of the play from a box with his mother. Later he attended, without his mother, a supper party in the rooms of Vivette — a rambling flat among the chimney-pots of Soho. She was bright with laughter and success, and Peter frowned to observe how easily she caught the mood of her company. He felt he would like to say or do something to bring depth into her eyes.

Peter and Atterbury were the last to leave, and they sat for a while to enjoy a friendly conversation. Vivette curled herself up.

“This is heavenly,” she purred. “I simply love peace and quietness.”

“I’ve noticed it,” said Peter bitterly, surveying a litter of empty champagne bottles on the table behind them.

“Don’t, Peter. You are spoiling the beautiful silence. Besides, your views are all wrong. The only people who really understand peace and quietness are people who also like a jolly good racket. We get it both ways.”

“You always do,” said Atterbury. “Life is the art of getting it both ways — eh, Vivette?”

“Not worth living,” grunted Peter.

“That’s your ignorance, Peter,” said Vivette.

Her eyes suggested a wicked godmother. "I don't know what's going to become of Peter," she added confidentially to Atterbury.

"You are really anxious?"

"Naturally. Peter's a temptation to all of us. He is so aggressively pure."

"You, at any rate, are safe," Atterbury audaciously hoped.

"For the time being," Vivette reassured him, "if Peter will only smile now and then. But he mustn't go on wearing his beautiful character like a medal."

Peter had bounded to the far end of the sofa. Now he rose, offering to go.

"You want to discuss me," he said.

"It doesn't matter, thank you; but if you really must—" Vivette held out her hand politely. Peter smacked it suddenly. Then he sat down again.

"What a wicked child," said Vivette, turning again to Atterbury. "Did you ever see such a temper? It's a curious thing about me," she added, discussing an interesting problem in character, "every man I have anything to do with sooner or later wants to hit me."

"Men like to be taken seriously."

"You never want to be taken seriously, do you, Jimmy?"

"I am not a typical man," retorted Atterbury.

"My men are never typical," said Vivette. "I hate typical men. I'm sure Peter isn't typical."



"He'll get there some day," Atterbury assured her.

"Not as far as that," she quickly hoped.

For the first time Peter detected a note of sincerity in her. He turned and found her jealously perusing him. He faintly coloured, and this time he really went.

After he had left them, Vivette and Atterbury looked intelligently at one another.

"I really mean it," she said at last. "I shouldn't like Peter to be a typical man."

"It will depend on his luck."

"You mean he must fall into the right hands?"

"When he does fall."

He looked at her keenly, and she coloured under his inspection.

"He mustn't fall into the hands of a nasty woman," she said.

"You would rather take him yourself?" Atterbury thoughtfully suggested.

"Sometimes, Jimmy, you are too familiar."

"I'm sorry," said Atterbury, beginning to look for his hat. "Let me thank you again for your beautiful acting. You saved my play to-night."

### XXXVIII

IN the coming months Peter met many of the friends of Vivette. He at once became enthusiastic, and insisted to Atterbury that they were much maligned by superior people. Atterbury agreed.

"They're the best-hearted people in the world," he said—"quite perfect if you don't have to do business with them."

"So genuine," Peter exclaimed.

"Very genuine," Atterbury echoed. "They always mean what they say. Of course they never mean the same thing for two days. But that only makes them more interesting."

He looked, as he said this, hard at Peter, and Peter flushed, knowing how justly he himself might be classed with enthusiastic people who change and range with the time. Why had he suddenly lost interest in the friends of Haversham and Lady Mary? He simply did not want to go on with them. He was caught up in this other set, and at heart he knew that his pleasure in these strangers was a dereliction. Their charm was superficial, their posturing was frequently half-bred. He realised that he was declining, through weariness, to a less excellent carriage of himself. He was unhappy and restless—tired enough to take and enjoy the second best.

Atterbury's play lived through the summer and

the autumn season. It outlived many great events — among them a general election which put in the Tories, and the marriage of Lady Mary with Lord Wenderby, then First Lord of the Admiralty.

As Peter stood in St. Margaret's watching the ceremony he could hardly believe that he had ever had a part in this great affair. It seemed that lately he had gradually come down to a pleasant valley. It was incredible that he had ever breathed high air with the radiant woman who now was the wife of the most powerful man in England.

Lady Mary's marriage made Peter think. Already Vivette was an obsession, serious enough to be noticed by his friends, and to interfere with his work. Peter began to be frightened, and secretly ashamed. His last years seemed all to be bound up with women. Was he never to be free of his foolish sensibility? Was he to fall helplessly from figure to figure as opportunity called him? There was work to do, but his fancy was perpetually caught and held in one monotonous lure.

Lady Mary had shown him there were other ends to follow than a personal and perfect mating. He was beginning to feel haunted. There was a murk in his brain — into which thoughts sometimes intruded which he found, in clear moments, to be shabby. They prompted him intimately towards Vivette. Perhaps it would give him peace if once for all he pricked the bubble of his expectation. Why should he not test this vision; pierce rudely in, and pass on? Sex was not all,

and if here he fell short of perfection, it was no great matter. He could leave that dream behind, no longer urged about it in a weary circle.

He felt at first that this impulse towards weak submission was treason to a secret part of himself that seemed to be waiting, seemed also to know that perfection would come and must find him virginal. But this feeling was less strong with the passing time. He came more and more to cherish the idea of Vivette. Her changing eyes became his only mirror wherein to look for an answer to his question, and when he did not find the answer he began stormily to wonder whether their cryptic shallows might not surrender the secret he desired if adventurously he dived deep enough.

This mood always found and left him deeply out of heart. It was part of a general feeling that he was gradually breaking down. Sometimes, in defence, it flung him to an extreme of carefully induced exaltation. When temptation whispered that Vivette was a pleasant creature, and would allow his love, he insisted, to justify his impulse to take her, that surely she must perfectly be his mate. His unconquerable idealism, weakened and gradually beaten down, required that he should thus deceive himself.

Through the winter — Atterbury's play still lingered — they frequently spent Sunday evening together in her Soho flat. Vivette alternated between fits of extreme physical energy — when she

took exercise in every discovered way — and complete inertia. Midwinter found her at the close of her hibernating — “lying fallow for the spring,” she described it. She passed her Sundays curled up in a deep settee by the fire. Peter spent long, drowsy afternoons and evenings reading with her, dropping occasional words, eating light food prepared by a cook who understood that her mistress must on no account be served with anything which required her to sit upright. Peter, who earlier in the year had ridden, rowed, and played tennis with Vivette, did not in the least like her present habits.

Upon a Sunday evening in February he discontentedly began to wait on her at supper.

“Dormouse,” he called from the table, “what are you going to drink?”

To his surprise Vivette suddenly sat up:

“Champagne to-night. I’m going to be full of beans. I shall do Swedish drill in the morning.”

“Not a day too soon,” grumbled Peter. “I wonder you can stand it, eating butter and cream all day and lying on your back. You must have the liver of a horse.”

“You are right,” she retorted. “People pretend to despise me for being lazy. It’s envy, Peter. Everybody would be lazy in the winter if their health would stand it.”

She pushed away a plate of delicate soufflé.

“Not to-night, Peter. I’m going to eat some meat.”

"I often wonder about you," said Peter.

"Really?"

"Do you do nothing with your whole heart, or everything?"

"Everything," said Vivette, with her mouth full.

"I don't believe anything really touches you."

Peter was trying to be serious.

"You are forgetting the champagne," she interrupted.

Peter went to the cupboard, brought out a bottle and exploded it.

"Thank you, Peter. There's nothing in the world like the pop of a champagne cork. It makes me think."

"Think?" said Peter, with his nose in the air.

"Yes," she insisted. "It makes me think how nothing matters at all, or how everything matters tremendously. I don't know which."

"I hate champagne," said Peter viciously.

"Of course."

"Why 'of course'?"

"There's something which doesn't fit in your popping a champagne cork. It's like laughing in church."

"Champagne is vulgar. It's only good for a bean-feast."

"You're going to have some, I suppose?" She looked at him in a way that spoke between the lines of her question.

Peter hated the challenge of her light inquiry.

He wanted to deepen it. In many small ways Vivette had held herself out to Peter, but she did not seem to care what he would do.

He poured himself some wine and drank to her.

"This is excellent champagne," he said brightly. Then he drooped. "It isn't my stuff," he added.

"I love it. Pop — and it's all over."

"It goes flat in the glass."

"Just for a moment it's perfect."

"The present, I suppose, is all that matters?" said Peter, heavily censorious.

"Why not?" she slanted her amusement at Peter, and delicately crushed the bubbles of her wine.

"Have you ever taken anything seriously in your life?" asked Peter.

"I have never inquired."

Her eyes flickered. Their wavering light exasperated his desire to move her deeply, to hold for a moment her nimble spirit that ran at a touch like quicksilver. She felt his rising passion, and her mimic soul responded under the surface of her laughter. She did not stir when Peter came near and took her by the shoulders. Her eyes were still the familiar changing shallows. They raised in Peter an ambition to see them deepen and burn.

"I would like to see you really *meaning* something," he said, tightening his grip upon her. "You are only a reflection. I want to see your own light shining."

"Is this a poem, Peter? Or are you trying to save my soul?"

Would she never be serious? Peter was angry and miserable. His late brooding came to a point. He wanted to touch Vivette, and he wanted an excuse. He could not play her light game of pleasure without insisting that it was something more.

Vivette saw the pain in his eyes. More gravely than she had yet spoken she said to him:

"I might be very real, if only you believed it."

He bent eagerly towards her:

"I am going to kiss you, Vivette."

Her eyes did not change. They were evasive still. Peter held her small face between his palms — the face of a happy child, with pleasure visibly in store. He had agreeably stirred her light senses. He turned abruptly away.

"There is no feeling in you," he said.

"Do you expect me to faint away?"

"I want you to care."

"Perhaps I do."

"You really care?"

"I care in my own way."

They sat together by the fire, and Peter held her lightly beside him. This was no conquest, or rapture of intimacy. He could not believe that he had really moved her. The more he grew alive to her physical presence and the implication of her surrender, the more he desired a guarantee that their love should be permanent and true. He



wanted an assurance that this adventure was not ignoble. He wanted again to be justified.

He grew every instant more sensible of their intimacy. He tried to persuade himself that this was the real and perfect thing; that the stir of his senses, under which he weakly drooped, was the call of two passionate hearts. He wavered absurdly. Once he suffered an impulse to take Vivette brutally, without disguise, as an offered pastime. Then he shrank from so immediate a declension from his vanishing idealism, and inwardly clamoured that he loved her. There he ultimately fixed his mind. He looked at Vivette and found in her an increasing gravity. She was becoming aware of Peter's trouble. She was beginning to understand it, and to be seriously concerned. But Peter mistook her dawning compassion. He caught eagerly at the sober spirit which now possessed her. He suddenly heard himself propose to her.

"Will you marry me, Vivette?"

He saw the laughter leap into her eyes; but, even as he shrank, it passed, and they lit with affectionate pity.

"Peter," she said very gently, "do you know what you are talking about?"

"I have asked you to marry me."

"Of course not."

"You do not care enough?" he suggested.

"I care enough to-night. But there is next year and the year after that."

"I want to be sure that this is serious," said Peter, with clenched hands.

"Of course it is. It is more serious than I thought anything could be."

Clearly she was now in earnest. Even Peter might have found her adequate. But he had now committed himself deeply to the proof he required. He knew it was at bottom indefensible — that he was merely trying to build a refuge for his self-respect.

"If you really cared for me," he persisted, "you would not refuse to marry me."

"Marriage is not my way," she protested.

"I ask you with my whole soul."

"Your whole soul?" She smiled a little, but added gravely:

"You make things very difficult. This shows how badly you want to be looked after."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see how easily I might play up to you? Do you think it would be very difficult for an actress like me to love you 'with my whole soul' and win you altogether on my own terms?"

"You mean," Peter flashed at her, "that you might easily pretend."

"It would not be difficult," she said, a little sadly.

Vivette was feeling unlike herself. She was now unselfishly solicitous for Peter. She saw how helpless he was, restless and curious of life, ever more firmly held by one idea. She pictured

him falling to some woman, hot and unscrupulous, who would coarsely tear the veil he fastidiously desired to lift, and for ever destroy for him the nobility of passion.

But Peter cut into her thoughts.

"Are you changing your mind?" he asked abruptly.

"No, Peter. I am only thinking."

"Then it is good-bye."

He moved towards the door. Vivette saw him passing out of her keeping. She saw him stumbling forward to disillusion and possible disgust. She could not let him go like that. She was zealous that his adventure should not end wholly in disaster.

Out of sudden pity she called to him.

"Peter!"

He paused at the door but did not turn.

She collected her courage. Surely it would be better for Peter, then and there, to end. Her spirit was alive to him. It would be an episode, but it would not be sordid. She saw a hundred ways in which Peter might fare so immeasurably worse. For an instant she shrank from the ordeal. She would have to sink her pride and solicit him. It was a bitter part for Vivette. The words dropped from her low and quiet.

"You may stay with me to-night."

Peter turned uncertainly. She saw his face like a beaten flame. He had yet to realise what she was saying.

"We are alone, Peter. You may stay with me here. I ask you to stay."

Now the flame spread in his face unchecked. She had dropped the veil, and he was driven towards her.

"You can do this, Vivette, and yet you will not marry me."

"To-night."

"For ever."

"For ever a memory — with nothing to regret."

Peter desperately kissed her, but with his climbing luxury his will climbed also, and his spirit cried out again for a justification. Like a refrain he repeated:

"This means you will marry me."

"No."

He returned wearily to his point.

"You do not care enough," he persisted.

"You tell me that," she cried, "after what I have said to you!"

She broke from him, and Peter knew he was far astray. But he shut himself from this better knowledge. He gave himself up to his fixed idea.

"I do not understand you. Prove to me that you care."

"I have proved it."

"An easy proof."

Peter hated himself for this angry stab at her. She went pale.

"I did not mean it," he cried at once.

“A light woman lightly offered,” she said, interpreting his reproach.

“No.”

He sank beside her in an agony of penitence. But she drew away from him, and he accepted her decision. There could be no more love to-night. The pallor had not left her face, and it struck into Peter a sense of enormous guilt. Again she pitied him.

“Come to me here to-morrow,” she said. “I want to talk to you.”

She held out her hand to him. He clasped it good night and left her.

## XXXIX

PETER, away from Vivette, knew only that he had wronged her. He did not understand exactly how he had transgressed. He could not read her conduct at all. Her strange lapse into sincerity simply puzzled him. She had seemed, at the moment when she had put herself into his hands, protective and thoughtful.

Peter knew her impulse was rooted in honour. He exaggerated the evil of his graceless words, treading the familiar way of abasement and remorse. He now desired only to be pardoned. He called upon her at an early hour.

Vivette had spent the time wondering at depths in herself unsuspected. Hitherto her life had run a career of adventurous and impulsive hedonism. She had loved easily, and easily taken the thing she desired. She only asked of life that delicacy and fair play should not be offended. She did not understand virtue. Her principle had always been lightly to take the way of least resistance. Now, suddenly from somewhere, sprang a devoted altruism — a passionate resolution that another should see life beautifully open its treasure.

Her impulse had been to save Peter from sordidly failing. She had not acted from jealousy. She had never less been sensually led than when she had entreated Peter. Her lips curved in

contemplation of a discovered irony in things. Peter had urged her to be serious. Very well: Peter should that day be made to realise how serious she could be. She had decided to talk to him frankly. She would not repeat her offer or allow it now to be accepted. She was glad that it had the previous evening miscarried. She had thought of a better way. Peter must be made to understand his condition.

She did not admit that her offer had been wrongly made. Peter's adventure would not with her have ended perfectly; but neither would it have ended in a fruition merely brutal. She realised how gradually he was losing grip of himself, and saw him soon as tinder for any woman with brains and a high temperature. She saw him slipping his self-respect. She would last night have saved him from the worst. There was friendliness and grace enough between them to justify their passion. But Vivette was now differently inspired. Surely Peter could be braced and stiffened. He was not yet attacked in his will. He was merely blind and drifting, perhaps unaware of his trouble.

He found her sitting, an image of graven severity, curiously out of tune with her cheerful room. He felt like a schoolboy called to repeat a lesson in which he had failed to satisfy.

"I have offended you," he tragically began.

But Vivette intended to be strictly sensible.

"That is what I want to talk about," she said, very matter-of-fact. "I don't think you under-

stand what happened last night. I am going to tell you."

Peter was puzzled. She was not Vivette of the shallow eyes. He caught her hands to draw her towards him, but she firmly resisted.

"No, Peter. Sit still and listen to what I have to say."

Peter flung himself, evilly discontented, in a far corner of the settee.

"You always wanted me to be serious," said Vivette, looking at him with some amusement. "But it does not seem to please you."

Peter could not at once recover from his rejected tenderness, but he felt he was behaving badly again. He contrived to put a little grace into his manner.

"I will listen," he said briefly.

"Tell me," Vivette began, "what are you supposed to be doing with yourself?"

"Doing with myself?" he echoed. Already he was conscious of her drift.

"You never talk of your work."

"I am reading for the Bar."

"What does that mean?" she smiled. Vivette had met these young barristers.

"I shall soon be called."

"Till then, you will be waiting for work."

"You are interested?" Peter inquired with an effort to assume an innocent detachment.

"Hasn't it occurred to you," Vivette persisted, "that you're in rather a bad way?"



He moved uncomfortably, then rushed to the point:

“ You mean I’m just loafing about? ”

“ You’re not really interested in your work. ”

“ You are indeed serious, ” said Peter, again trying to make light of her catechism. “ Aren’t you overdoing it? ”

Vivette sharply rebuked him, and he did not again interrupt. She held to him an unflattering mirror in which he saw an image of himself which frightened him. He was rich. He had nothing particular to do. He drifted about, meeting elegant and attractive people — mostly women. Everywhere he unconsciously opened himself to one appeal. He was idle; and he was obsessed.

He struggled against this indictment. He even became angry. What did this talk of Vivette really mean? It meant that he desperately loved her.

“ This obsession you tell me of! ” he cried.

“ It is you. ”

“ For the time being, ” she shortly answered.

“ Always, ” he insisted.

“ It might easily be someone else. Think, Peter. Have you once been free during these last years? ”

Peter was silent.

“ What do you want me to say? ” he asked at last.

“ I want you to realise there are other things. You must not give way to this fixed idea. ”

Where before had Peter heard this? It seemed an echo. But he shut his ears.

"I have only one fixed idea. It is to marry you. You are pleading against yourself, Vivette."

"Put me out of account," she said sharply. "I have already refused."

They were again at the point where last night they had failed to agree.

Peter rose and walked to the end of the room and back to Vivette. He was beginning to measure her strength and subtlety, and they made it more difficult to lose her. His blood rose against the idea. He caught her roughly by the arm.

"Suppose I cannot put all this away? Suppose it has to be really an episode?"

Her arm tightened under his grip. She became cold and hostile.

"I don't understand," she said.

Peter felt his mind twisting like a serpent:

"Will you come back with me to last night?"

"You are talking nonsense. Put your head into your law-books, write plays, travel about — anything."

"I want you, Vivette."

She rose, and stood dismissing him. "This is worse than I thought. You are ready to take the second best."

"You are first and last."

"Therefore," she lashed at him, "you want me for a mistress."

"I have asked you to marry me."

“Marriage would not be the truth.”

Peter clenched his hands: “On any terms I must have you.”

“That is for me to say.”

Peter looked at Vivette and found her inexorably set against him. Clearly she was not that day to be moved. His passion died, and her words went poignantly home. He released her arm. His increasing dejection prompted Vivette to soften the steel of her manner:

“Cool yourself, Peter. Put me out of your mind. You are not looking for a mistress, and I want you to wait for the real thing.”

“To have you would be very real. You have proved already that you love me.”

She saw again the serpent's head and crushed it.

“I have loved before,” she said deliberately. “Last night would have meant less to me than to you. Is that what you want?”

Peter cursed himself, and went.

“Good-bye,” Vivette called to him. “Next time we meet I expect you to be in a better mind.”

Vivette now had leisure to be surprised at herself.

For the first time in her life she had refused something she really wanted. She decided that this was the limit of her generosity. She had refused Peter for herself, but at any rate no other woman should, without a title, pluck the fruit of her sacrifice. She would closely examine any claim on Peter which might be made.

## XL

IT did not take Peter long to feel that Vivette was wholly right. He blushed to recall how he had justified her indictment by the way in which he had received it.

That evening he made a plan. He had called the immediate future to account, and found he had six months to spare without much prospect of being usefully absorbed.

"I must get away from all this," he decided.

At the end of an evening spent restlessly at home, he startled Mrs. Paragon with the prospect of six months on the high seas.

"We will have a yacht," he told her. "I want to learn all about sailing. We'll go right away."

Mrs. Paragon calmly considered this. She was alarmed for Peter, though she did not know the extent of his last infatuation. Peter had instinctively kept Vivette out of his conversation. His mother and Vivette moved in different circles, and they had not yet met. Mrs. Paragon only knew that Peter had recently become profoundly interested in the theatre. Nevertheless Mrs. Paragon perceived as clearly as Vivette how things were with him.

"Where do you think of going?" She showed no surprise at his sudden idea.

"Anywhere," said Peter vaguely.

"When do you think of starting?"

"Immediately."

Mrs. Paragon realised that something had happened.

"This is very sudden," she suggested.

"I've been thinking, mother."

"Is that all?" Mrs. Paragon inquired, quite innocent of any desire to be satirical. She merely asked.

"I ought to be doing something," Peter explained. "I know all this law stuff by heart. I'm sick of London."

"I thought you were so interested in everything."

"No, mother."

"Not in the theatre?"

Again Mrs. Paragon merely asked.

"That's over now," said Peter.

Mrs. Paragon reached at the heart of things in one sure gesture of the mind.

"What has she said to you?" she calmly inquired.

Peter stared in the manner of one whose thoughts are unexpectedly read.

"I asked her to marry me."

"She refused?"

"She wants me to think of something else."

Mrs. Paragon wondered a moment why an actress had refused. She also wondered whether the actress might not change her mind.

"I will come with you, Peter," she said decisively.

Peter flung himself with ardour into the work of finding a boat and getting together a crew. His condition was well known to Atterbury, who persuaded Haversham to help him in getting Peter equipped. They hunted out a skipper in Havre whose quality they knew, Atterbury going to interview and bring him over. It was decided they should sail immediately.

Vivette was soberly pleased at the success of her one good action.

"I've ordered Peter into the South Seas," she told Atterbury. "I think he'll be safe from the brown ladies."

It was arranged that Peter should give a farewell dinner. Atterbury insisted on the Savoy, and tactfully picked a day when the Wenderbys were to be out of town. He frankly discussed the position over Mrs. Paragon's dinner-table in Curzon Street. Vivette was there — accepted by Mrs. Paragon with large reserve.

"We want all Peter's friends," he said, "except those who cannot be present. It will be an advantage if Lady Mary is far away. She doesn't go at all well with Vivette."

"Agreed," said Vivette. "She would snuff me out. This is to be my feast. I hardly know whether I ought to allow Mrs. Paragon," she added.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Paragon shortly.

"But it isn't nonsense," persisted Vivette. "I shall simply disappear beside you."

"Then you must make up your mind to it," said Atterbury. "I'm arranging this dinner, and I must have Mrs. Paragon. I have given up Lady Mary."

"We ought to have Lady Mary on the mantel-piece," said Vivette. "She'd go so well with the china."

"Envy," Atterbury retorted. "You say that because you can't sit still, and haven't a decent feature in your face."

"Lady Mary is the most beautiful woman in the world," Peter solemnly intervened.

"Hark to the oracle," cried Vivette.

"He's not far wrong," said Atterbury. "My heart always beats a little faster when she comes suddenly round the corner in a crush."

"Her mouth is all wrong."

"Glass houses, Vivette — you've nothing but your figure and the noise you make."

"You agree with Peter?"

"Not entirely. Lady Mary's good for a queen."

"She's the most beautiful woman in the world," Peter insisted.

"You're wrong, Peter. I saw the most beautiful woman in the world four days ago."

"This is interesting," said Vivette.

"It was in the boat from Havre. I saw at once how beautiful she was and looked after her. She

is now at Claridge's and refuses to see me. I think she's from Brittany. Maddened by her extreme loveliness, I indiscreetly dreamed she might come to our dinner."

"Just as we are sending Peter safely out of harm's way," exclaimed Vivette. "You must have lost your senses."

"I have."

"What is her name?" Peter asked.

"You see," said Vivette, "you have already excited the poor boy."

"I have got her picture."

"Is it a funny one?" asked Vivette.

"I'm more than a caricaturist. I made a sketch of her on deck when she wasn't looking. What do you think of her, Mrs. Paragon?"

Mrs. Paragon took the sketch and quietly examined it.

"I should like her to come to Peter's dinner," she said. "What is her name?"

"Mdlle. Le Roy," said Atterbury.

Vivette looked at Mrs. Paragon in astonishment.

"May I look?" she asked. Mrs. Paragon handed her the sketch.

"Yes," said Vivette, "she is certainly beautiful."

Atterbury turned to her:

"She will be worse for you than Lady Mary."

"That was my nonsense. I love a beautiful woman." She handed back the picture.



"Peter hasn't seen it. He may not approve," she warned Atterbury.

"I'm arranging this dinner," said Atterbury. "Still Peter may look."

"I'll wait for the original," Peter growled.

"Where do you say she is staying?" said Peter's mother to Atterbury.

Atterbury wrote out the name and address on a card and gave it to Mrs. Paragon.

"I see this is your affair," he said. "I rely on you."

Mrs. Paragon now took Vivette into the drawing-room. Peter and his friend talked yachting shop, and gave them time to become better acquainted.

Mrs. Paragon did not take kindly to Vivette, but she realised that, as a mother, she owed her something, and she tried to put away her distrust. They talked without reserve, so far as appearance went; but Vivette knew she was not admitted far. She ruefully accepted the inevitable. She did not understand at all why Mrs. Paragon had taken it into her head to bring a stranger into Peter's farewell. Mrs. Paragon mildly baffled her polite astonishment.

"Is it quite fair to me?" asked Vivette, still talking of Mdlle. Le Roy. "I think I deserve to be considered. I'm sending Peter away."

"He will come back," said Mrs. Paragon briefly.

"Safe and sound," Vivette put in.

"Then you may change your mind."

"I can be really serious in some ways."

"There is a risk," Mrs. Paragon insisted.

Her obstinacy reminded Vivette of Peter at his worst.

"There is always a risk," she protested.  
"You can't tie Peter up."

"No: I can't tie Peter up," Mrs. Paragon agreed, shutting her lips.

Vivette tried to get in by another door.

"Mdlle. Le Roy," she suggested, "is going to efface me."

"Why should I wish it?" Mrs. Paragon innocently inquired.

"Perhaps you like the look of her."

"I do."

Vivette sighed.

"Peter won't have a very happy farewell," she said.

A week later Atterbury remembered his beautiful stranger only as a guest to be identified by a card upon the table. Peter had entirely forgotten her, and Vivette, looking forward to an evening of light pleasure, agreeably dashed with regret, did not take Mdlle. Le Roy into serious account.

The whole party was assembled in the Pinafore rooms at the Savoy, but Mrs. Paragon had not yet arrived. Peter had come early to approve the arrangements Atterbury had made, and had left his mother to follow by way of Claridge's. He was talking now with Haversham.

Vivette saw a light leap suddenly into Peter's eyes. He seemed like one confronted with a miracle.

"This," Vivette bitterly concluded, "is love at first sight."

But Vivette was wrong. Peter's brain was dazzled as by lightning. A flood of forgotten life was loosed upon him out of the past. He was looking at Miranda.

## XLI

MRS. PARAGON had at once recognised Atterbury's sketch. She went, the day after she had seen it, to verify, waiting in the hotel in quiet amazement. It seemed strange to come to this place for Miranda. She remembered her as an awkward girl, hoydenly and tempestuous, absurdly transfigured by Peter's worship. Then she had found her again sleeping in Peter's brain, to lose her for ever in a brutal disaster of the sea.

Miranda came slowly to meet her, holding in her hand the card she had sent.

She had grown to the loveliness Peter had divined in her. Her eyes had softened, their passion held in reserve. The lines of her beauty were severe, but their severity veiled the promise of her surrender. She was radiant with a vitality serenely masked — a queen ready at the true word to come down.

She looked from the card she held to Mrs. Paragon.

"You are Peter's mother," she said, in the manner of one speaking to herself.

"You remember him?" asked Mrs. Paragon. Miranda did not answer.

"Come to my room," she said, and led the way upstairs.

Her room was cheerful with firelight and simple

comfort. Mrs. Paragon again wondered at finding her thus alone and able to command. Miranda drew her a chair to the fire, and, as Mrs. Paragon sat down, she put an arm about her shoulder and looked at her.

"I've often wondered what you were like," she said.

"You had forgotten?"

"I was only a girl. Memories are not to be trusted."

"You never tried to correct them?"

"I have heard of you often. You did not seem to want me."

"I have been looking for you," said Mrs. Paragon.

"Have you found what you expected?"

Mrs. Paragon put her hand upon Miranda's arm.

"Indeed I have," she quietly asserted. "I think you are the girl that Peter knew."

"Please," Miranda entreated. Mrs. Paragon had moved too quickly towards her secret. There was a short silence.

"Tell me," said Miranda at last. "When did you begin to look for me?"

"As soon as I knew that Peter needed you."

"He needs me?" said Miranda quickly. "How do you know that?"

"He was once very ill. He talked of you continually."

"I have heard of Peter," she objected a little

hardly. "I have heard of him as entirely happy. Lately, too, in Paris I met a friend of Vivette Claire."

"Peter is in need of you," Mrs. Paragon insisted.

She spoke as one returning to the thing which really mattered.

"I wonder." Miranda looked thoughtfully at Mrs. Paragon.

"You are like my memory of you," she continued. "I remember you as always quiet and wise — as one who said only what was true."

"I know that Peter needs you."

"Does Peter himself know?" Miranda drily asked.

"I want you to come back. He will know when he sees you."

"You believe, if I met him to-morrow, the years between would disappear?" Miranda suggested, smiling at her idea.

"I am sure," Mrs. Paragon insisted.

"It would be interesting," said Miranda.

Her touch of irony was lost on Peter's mother, who saw no call for smiling.

"Have you no feeling for Peter?" she seriously urged.

"I do not know," Miranda answered bluntly, with a small shrug of her shoulders.

"Ask yourself."

"It is for Peter to ask."

"This is not generous, Miranda."

Miranda rose and walked to the fire. She stood for a moment looking away from Mrs. Paragon.

"I will tell you the truth," she said at last. "I went out of Peter's life five years ago, and I said I would not return unless he wanted me. He was only a boy. I have put away all thought of him. If I come back to him now, I come as a stranger to be won again. I do not know Peter to-day."

"Peter is still the same."

Miranda was beginning to rebel against the immovable conviction of Peter's mother. Mrs. Paragon was so calm and sure.

"How can I know that?" she exclaimed impatiently.

"You can meet him," answered Mrs. Paragon. She had the air of one suggesting the obvious thing to a child.

Miranda began to be seriously moved. Could she recapture the dead time? She saw herself quaintly perched on the slates of a roof sobbing her heart out, and again in a dark garden with Peter suddenly on his knees to her, kissing the hem of her frock. Perhaps, if she met him, without allowing him time to prepare, the truth would flash out of him.

"Where can I meet him suddenly?" she asked.

Mrs. Paragon quietly accepted her victory.

"I have come to invite you," she said. "You shall see him with Vivette Claire."

"What have I to do?"

"You need only be ready here in a week's time."

I will take you to dinner. It is a farewell dinner. Peter is going to sea for six months."

"I will come."

This was not Mrs. Paragon's last visit to Claridge's. In the days between her discovery of Miranda and Peter's dinner she talked with Miranda frequently and long. Miranda learned the whole story of Peter's life; learned also to sound every deep place in his mother.

Of Miranda there was less to tell than the change in her seemed to require. Her father and mother had drowned fighting for life in the sea. She had waited on deck to the last, calmly accepting her fate. The terrible scenes about her of people huddled to a brutal end had not shaken her spirit. At the last moment she was pulled on to a raft, and made fast by the man who had found it. They passed through the night together, and he said she had saved him from despair. He was a Canadian farmer of French extraction. She passed for two years as his daughter, and at his death inherited his fortune. He had made her love the French, and she had lived mainly in France for the last three years.

Thus had Miranda been kept, aloof and free; and thus wonderfully restored. There were a hundred prosaic ways in which her rediscovery might have been arranged; but for Peter, because Peter was young, the incredible was achieved. Chance had waited for her most effective moment, and was resolute that it should not be marred.



Miranda's coming, like all true miracles, could only grow more wonderful the more it was explained.

Upon the evening of Peter's dinner, Mrs. Paragon found Miranda serenely ready. She admitted to no excitement.

"You need not look at me like that," she said to Mrs. Paragon when they met. "I am going to be introduced to a strange young man. It is not at all disturbing."

A few minutes later she passed into the room where Peter's friends were waiting. Atterbury claimed her at once. Then it came to a meeting. She caught Peter in the flash of his discovery. The sudden glory of his lighted face blinded her to the years between them. She felt her pulses leap eagerly at her sovereign peace, but outwardly she was still. She calmly ignored his recognition. She bowed to him as a stranger, and passed in to dinner with Atterbury.

## XLII

PETER at dinner was next Vivette, and Atterbury, with Miranda, was at the far end of a long table. He heard only snatches of their talk, enough to show that Miranda entirely outmatched him in conversation and address. She was complete mistress of herself. She had put away all sense of crisis, ignoring the tumult of her late encounter. Atterbury loved all things French, and Peter had many opportunities to notice their enthusiastic agreement.

Peter could not so well recover. Miranda's return had blotted out the last five years. He saw no change in her. She was the woman he had always divined her to be. He had never seen in her the awkward girl whose disappearance Mrs. Paragon had noted. Her refusal to accept him at once and take up their life from the point at which they had parted became increasingly absurd as in numberless gestures, in the play of her spirit made visible, he recognised ever more clearly the girl he had lost. His wonder grew, equally, at the way in which for five years he had ignored her existence. These years now seemed unreal. Surely he had loved her always, and always had been full of her.

If only he called to her in the old familiar way, surely she would no longer play the stranger. She

would recognise their bond, and all this pageant, holding them absurdly apart, would disappear.

Miranda knew how Peter watched her; how he was living himself back into the past; how he was seeking for a sign that she admitted their union. But she would not yet confess that between them a secret current ran even as she talked and laughed and accepted Atterbury's vivacious gallantry. She had yet to hear from Peter why for five years he had made no sign. He deserved at any rate to be put on his defence.

Peter's wonderful last adventure returned upon him in waves of unhappy consciousness, to be decently put away in heroic efforts to entertain his guests, and be the companion of Vivette. But it was always with a start of the mind that he returned to his duties.

Vivette was deeply offended. Peter was again on fire. She had seen him leap into flame at the sight of a stranger. She had not expected her warning to Peter to be so quickly justified. His behaviour to-night, to put it no higher, was a breach of manners. She had taken Peter very seriously, and he now was doing his best to show she had been mistaken. Her face visibly burned when she remembered how intimately she had abased herself. He had touched a deeper vein in her than she had known, but now he was turning her late act to ridicule.

She talked to him only in answers, and several times he found her distastefully watching the ab-

sorbed trend of his attention towards Miranda. Peter was now wholly wretched. Between himself and Miranda a gulf was fixed, and Vivette's hostility aggravated his misery.

At last Vivette and Peter were isolated from the conversation. Their neighbours were each talking on the other side. Peter felt the strain was becoming intolerable. He had turned from watching Miranda to Vivette, and her contemptuous amusement whipped him to a defence.

"This is not what it seems," he said in a low voice.

"Perfection at last," Vivette contemptuously suggested.

"I have known her for years," he pleaded, glancing towards Miranda.

"Really I can't listen. Let us at least bury our own affair."

"I am speaking the literal truth."

Vivette was surprised at his vehemence.

"I am not good at riddles," she said, looking at him closely.

"You don't know what has happened."

"I know," Vivette retorted in a voice that cut him, "that you have had the discourtesy to be smitten with a strange woman within a week of making love to me."

"She is the first woman I ever knew."

Vivette looked closely at Peter.

"It is the literal truth," he said. "Five years ago."

Vivette looked from his face, blazing with veracity, to the very sociable stranger at the other end of the table.

"She does not seem to remember," she objected incisively.

Peter followed Vivette's glance towards Miranda, radiantly responding to the talk of Atterbury.

Conversation broke out again on either side, claiming them. Vivette had seen the truth in Peter's face. Her hostility was checked. She felt another kind of interest in Miranda, watching her carefully. When next she had an opportunity of speaking in a personal way to Peter she had discovered that Miranda was less remote from Peter's excitement than she seemed. Her mind rapidly and generously took in the new position.

"What is her name?" she abruptly asked when they were free to talk.

"Her name was Miranda. Her other name was not Le Roy. I had lost sight of her."

"Had you also forgotten her?"

"Till to-night."

"And now," said Vivette, not without sarcasm, "you think you have always remembered."

"How do you know that?" Peter asked.

Vivette looked at his poor face and smiled. "She remembers you, Peter," she said. "She remembers you very well."

"She is utterly absorbed," objected Peter.

"It is overdone," Vivette decided.

"Why should she do it at all?"

"You best know if it serves you right."

"She must think I have never cared."

"Your mother arranged this meeting," said Vivette in meditation.

"She must have recognised Miranda from the sketch," Peter explained.

"How did your mother know you would remember her?"

"She knows everything," said Peter simply.

Mrs. Paragon sat quietly with Haversham. Haversham had noticed Peter's strange behaviour, and Mrs. Paragon had already told him the whole tale. The dinner proceeded to an end, its essential currents moving beneath the surface. Miranda, with veiled eyes, admitted by no sign that they in the least affected her. But she was gradually flooded with a tide of happiness. She held it off, allowing it only to polish further the glitter of her surface.

Peter's crowning misery that night was the speeches. Atterbury, proposing him, was unaware of any need for discretion. He tactfully and wittily pinned the toast to his caricature, already famous, of Peter as the Pilgrim of Love. The table roared with delight, and, finding Peter's response lacking in conviction, was more delighted at this further proof that Atterbury's barbs had stuck.

At last the party broke up. Vivette had by that time carefully measured Miranda.

"This is good-bye, indeed," she said to Peter at parting. Peter had taken her home to the flat in Soho. His mother had gone with Atterbury and Miranda.

"I'm not sure that I shall go," answered Peter obtusely, thinking of his desolate voyage.

"Precisely," said Vivette. "That is why I am saying good-bye."

Vivette held out her hand. Peter dubiously held it a moment.

"I have treated you very badly, Vivette."

"I am well pleased."

"I owe you so much," he insisted.

She put her free hand on his shoulder and lightly kissed him.

"How good you are, Vivette," Peter fervently exclaimed.

"You're spoiling it, as usual," said Vivette, softly writhing. "Please go at once. I am in the mood to part with you."

## XLIII

VIVETTE did not without regret see Peter go. But she had seen enough to realise that his adventures were at an end. She surrendered him to a better claim, as always she had decided to do. Her comedy, she told herself, had on the whole finished happily. Vivette had the fortunate ability to be done for ever with things ended. She was too thoroughly a player to wish the curtain raised upon a story technically finished.

Peter, too, had rung down the veil on his pilgrimage. He wanted to take up his life from the moment at which he had looked for Miranda in an empty house. It all came vividly to his mind again. The short ride home was thronged with scenes from his life of a boy. They rose from the stirred pools of memory. He could see pale clusters of the evening primrose, and smell the laden air of a place where he had waited for her long ago. He saw a heap of discoloured paper dimly lit by a struck match, lying in a far corner of a raftered room where he had lost her.

How could this girl have become a stranger? It was impossible. Yet it was also impossible that he for five years had neglected to look for her. He had not remembered her for five years. He



could not now believe it. The five years confronted him, inexorably accusing.

He reached Curzon Street, and at once looked for his mother. She could tell him all there was to know of Miranda, and in the morning he would go to her. His mother came from her room as Peter arrived on the stairs.

"You are tired, mother. You want to sleep?"

"We will talk in the morning, Peter."

"Not to-night?"

"It is not necessary to-night."

Mrs. Paragon smiled mysteriously, and added:

"You will find her in the drawing-room."

Peter's heart bounded.

"She is here?" he breathlessly asked.

He looked at the door between them. Mrs. Paragon kissed him good night without a word, and went into her room.

When Peter went in to Miranda he saw himself explaining away the years in a rush of eloquence. He would torrentially claim Miranda. He would persuade and overwhelm her.

Miranda, for her part, waited eagerly upon the event. She had decided to be mistress of herself till for herself she had judged that Peter's mother was right. She pretended she was not yet sure that Peter had never ceased to care. She wanted to play delicately with her glad conviction.

But Peter could not speak, and Miranda could not play. He came towards her and stood a moment. His lips foolishly quivered, and the veil

upon Miranda was torn. Her hand went out to him. She saw she had moved only when Peter dropped beside her chair. There was nothing now to explain. He just crept to her heart and rested.

The meeting of their eyes was not yet to be endured. They came together in a darkness of their own.

Gradually the trouble went out of their passion — a stream, no longer broken, but running deep. To Peter it seemed that the tranquil rhythm of the bosom where he lay had never failed.

“Why have we waited till now?” Peter softly wondered. “It cannot be true. I have come to you from yesterday.”

They were together a little longer, shyly approaching the wonder of their meeting, with broken words — fragments of speech pieced out with looks and touches.

When Miranda had left him, Peter pondered in her chair the things he had intended to say. He could not now believe they had so wonderfully taken everything for granted. Surely when morning came his peace and joy would vanish. Nothing would remain but his plans of yesterday for a holiday.

In the morning Miranda met him as a sensible woman with commonplaces to discuss. She had decided that Peter should carry out his plan for a voyage. She would stay in London, and be ready for his return. Peter demurred:

“Why should I go now?” he asked. “I have given all that up.”

“I want you to go,” she insisted.

“But you will come with me, Miranda?” pleaded Peter.

“I will come to the edge of your journey.”

Peter felt that Miranda was right. He would come to her with a mind blown fresh by the sea. No wraith of an experience unshared would survive into the perfect day of their marriage. The scattered rays of his passion were to be focussed anew in a dedication absolute and untroubled. The present was haunted by the shadows he had pursued. They flitted between them, to be immediately recognised for shadows and to be put away; but, even so, their joy was faintly marred by the accusing years. Let them be utterly forgotten.

Miranda that evening went on board Peter's yacht. They lay till sunset off the Isle of Wight, till a red glow lit the western cliffs. Then Miranda went over the side, and from a small boat watched the beautiful ship vanish into the open sea. Peter stood to the last, erect and still, and as the distance widened between them Miranda wanted for a moment to call him back. Her sensitive idealism seemed out of reason now that her lover was disappearing into the haze.

Then she overcame her moment of regret. She had given him up to the burning sea, into whose spaces he sailed. He would come back to her inspired with the light and freedom of blue water.

He would find her each day in the triumphing sun, in the gleam of breaking surf, in perfume carried from an Indian shore, in the shining of far mountains. He would fling out his love to catch at all the loveliness into which he was passing. The coloured earth should paint and refashion her; the sea should consecrate her; permanent hills, seen far off, should invest her in queenliness. Her hand should be upon him in the velvet wind. Her mystery should fall upon him out of the deep sky.

Could she regret days which were thus to glorify her? Filled with happiness, exultant and sure, she strained no longer after the lost ship. Peter had disappeared into a yellow mist that girdled all the visible sea. But already she saw him returning to claim in her all the beauty into which he sailed.

## XLIV

PETER and Miranda were looking out over the selfsame burning water into which she had lately dismissed him. Six to seven months had passed, and on the morning of that day they had quietly been married in London. Now they stood high upon the cliffs overhanging a small western bay.

It was early September, and the night was warm. The water was lightly wrinkled. It shimmered from the extreme height at which they viewed it, like beaten metal. The light rapidly died down, and already the lit rooms of a house were brighter than the sky. The house was beneath them, alone upon the side of a steep hill, its windows wide to the sea.

Peter was alone with Miranda for the first time that day. Hardly a week ago he had been eagerly looking each morning towards England. From the time he had landed, and Miranda had seen in him a soul swept clean, a will straining towards her, he had lived in the clutch of preparation and routine. All was now ready, every unessential thing put away.

In long days upon the deck of his yacht Peter had come to distinguish between the physical unrest of his late years — vague and impersonal, afflicting him like hunger or the summer heat —

and the perfect passion of his need for Miranda.

Gradually, too, in these long weeks upon the sea Peter began to see steadily things which hitherto had wavered. He had touched reality at last. He overleaped the categories in a burning sense that life was very vast and very near; that the virtue of men could not easily be measured and ranked; that the wonder of existence began when it ceased consciously to confront itself, to probe its deep heart, and absurdly to appoint itself a law. He went through his adventures of the last few years with a smile for his ready infatuation with small aspects of men and things. He had attempted to inspect the discipline of the world, calling mankind to attention as though it were a regiment. He had been a Socialist, and then very nearly a Tory. Now, between sky and water, he vainly tried to constrain things to a formula. He found that he no longer desired to do so. He began to understand his mother's deep, instinctive acceptance of time and fate. All now seemed unreal, except the quiet, happy, and assured act of life itself. Craning at the Southern stars, he no longer desired to measure or to track their passage. He felt them rather as kindred points of energy. The pedantry and pride of knowledge, the ambition to assess, the need to round off heaven, to group mankind in a definite posture and take for himself a firmly intelligible attitude in his own time and way — these things had suddenly left him. Life was now emotion-

ally simple, and it therefore had ceased to be intellectually difficult. He had found humour and peace — an absolute content to receive the passing day. Life itself mattered so much to him — so brimmed him with the passion of *being* — that all he had thought or read was now rebuked as an insolent effort to contain the illimitable.

Interminably, of course, he thought of his personal quest. It all seemed very simple now. He had had some unhappy and trivial adventures. Their sole importance was to make him measure truly the high place of love. In the beginning was blind desire. Then the soul, with eyes for beauty and the power to elect, turned an instinct of the herd to a passion of the individual will — a passion whose fruit was loyalty and sacrifice, the treasures of art and the face of nature wrought into a countenance friendly and beautiful. So mighty had this passion grown that now it could command, as an instrument, the need out of which it came.

Love was now the measure of a man. Either it put him among creatures groping uneasily till driven by appetite or fear, or it lifted him among the inheritors of passion, a gift rare as genius, a sanctuary from the driven flesh.

To-night, as Peter sat with Miranda looking towards the sea, the substance of these thoughts lay under the surface of his joy. He wondered if for ever he could beat his wings so high. Surely to die soon would be the perfect mating. They

were now upon a peak whence it was only possible to come down.

They sat quietly as the moments drifted. Words between them suddenly broke upon notes trembling on the edge of silence. To the passion of his adolescence — the passion of five years ago, recovered in Indian seas and among lonely islands of the Pacific — was added now something so intimate and personal that Peter saw in the fall of Miranda's dress and the poise of a comb in her hair syllables to make him wise. Her beauty had seemed, moments ago, to fill him, but still it poured from her.

He feared to think that this was only a beginning. How could he suffer more happiness and live? He could dwell for ever upon the line of her throat; and when he took her hands it seemed as if she gave to him all he could endure to possess. He feared to be stunned and blinded with her light, and he felt in himself an equal energy to dazzle and consume. It must surely be death to touch her to the heart, to pierce rashly to the secret of her power.

Into his happiness there intruded, when it gave him leave, a profound gratitude. He felt the need of a visible Power to thank. Almost it seemed he had supernaturally been led to this perfect moment, to encounter it perfectly. All his youth was gathered up. He would plunge at once to the heart of love, his soul unblunted, no step of his adventure known. Many times, during his



days at sea, he had trembled to think how near he had come to losing the unspoiled mystery of the gift Miranda kept. He had marvelled at the delicate justice and complete right of her wish that he should clear his soul of all memories they did not share before they intimately met.

Now in the falling dark they sat looking sometimes to sea, sometimes to the light that beckoned them home, sometimes to the secret which ever more insistently urged and troubled them. They felt the call of their marriage, bidding them closer yet. It shone upon them out of Miranda's window in the house below. To this window he had sailed alone in his ship for long nights. Now that it shone so near, imperiously beckoning, it hardly seemed an earthly lamp, but one that, when he stepped towards it, must suddenly go out or move away.

But the lure was true, for he found it also in Miranda — the look he had seen in her eyes years ago when first he had kissed her. She seemed to be giving herself to him — to give and give again, with treasures uncounted to follow. Yet it was not mere giving, but a passing of virtue from one to the other.

“I am glad we waited until now,” Peter said in a note so low that it hardly reached her. “Why were you so wise to send me away? Each day has added to you. I cannot believe I shall ever hold you. It seems like wanting the whole world.” He waved his hand at the sea.

"I could not endure to be less than the whole world," she quickly answered.

"I could die with you now. Life can never again be so wonderful."

Then, suddenly, words were foolish, and he abruptly ceased.

The last light of a day, which to-night had lain very late upon the water, had gone quite out. Hardly could they see each other; and missing the lost message of their eyes they pressed closely together. The beckoning window shone more brightly in the dark. Soon it put out land and sky. It could not be avoided. Together they read and answered the steady call. It put between them a growing distress.

"Kiss me, my husband, and let me go."

Her heart, as Peter took her in his arms, was beating like a creature caught and held.

She almost disappeared into the dark as she went down; but he followed her with his eyes, alert for every step of her passage. At last she had reached the house, and soon Peter could see the light of her room waver with her moving to and fro.

Only Miranda's window was shining now.

Then, with a swiftness that struck mortally at his heart, Miranda's window also was dark, or so it seemed, for the light went down.

Peter spread his arms and stood full breathing for a moment, fighting desperately with an unknown power. He had a swift vision of her wait-

ing. Then he went down the hill, and felt the earth like a carpet spread for his marriage. He turned once only at the door to take, as he felt, a last look at the stars. They seemed like a handful of dust he had flung at the sky.

## XLV

PETER did not know that happiness could be so tranquil till in the morning he floated with Miranda upon the quiet sea. It seemed that only now did he have peace and time to realise that the miracle of their love was complete. It flooded him slowly in the silence of the dawn, as, waking to the chatter of birds, he lay without stirring, fearing to shake the comfort of a perfect memory. Miranda, waking soon, had answered his thought with only a pressure of the hand. The slow opening of her eyes, deep with fulfilment, sealed their marriage in the sun, assuring him it was not a passing ecstasy of moonlight and dark hours.

Then they had planned for the day to sail before a light wind, rounding the western rocks of the island. This would meet their need to be happily alone.

Peter had hired a tiny lugger in the bay, and they were passing now under the cliffs, making to weather the Needles and enjoy the painted glory of Alum.

The peace of a track almost unvisited, and the unnatural calm of the water, emphasized the cruelty of this iron shore. The sea lapped softly into worn caves at the base of the cliff. Sometimes it idly flung a wave of the tide so that it

slapped at a hollow rock as at a muted drum, making a sound faintly terrible, like an understatement of something too evil to be uttered aloud.

Peter shuddered at the sound and at the sleeping white horror of the shore. He thought with regret of the sheltered and homely bay they had left. He had seen and enjoyed places more wild and lonely than this; but to-day he seemed no longer to desire their inhuman beauty.

Last night, upon the cliff, he had been ready to jump at death. It had seemed the only possible consummation of a passion that reached beyond him. But to-day he walked upon the earth. Something was added to his love — a comfortable sanity, a touch of dear humour, an immense friendliness.

He began to find in Miranda a homeliness more thrilling than the virginal beauty he had hardly dared to see. The wind and sun of their ride yesterday through Hampshire had rudely touched her face. To-day it was visibly peeling. She was no longer, in his eyes, remote and queenly, but she was infinitely more precious. He saw that her arm was freckled at the wrist.

Passion would take them again, and lift them above the world, coming and going as the spirit moved. But now there was something new, something he had not before encountered, a steady will to suffer with his beloved, to live between four walls, and encounter each small adventure in a loyal league against time.

The stress of his late years was now forgotten. He was eager for work — to fill up his life and make firm his foothold among men. His mind was swept and purified, his brain made clear and sweet. Life had perspective now. Miranda's humour and clear vision had touched him, conveyed in the miracle of their intimate life. He could smile now at the blind energy, the enthusiasms, sudden and absurd, of his late career. They became unreal as he talked with Miranda.

Every little thing was pleasant — their unsuccessful shots at a mooring; a picnic in the boat, swinging under the Alum cliffs; Miranda's lesson in ropes and knots; their landing on the beach in a gentle surf; the elfin look of Miranda's dripping hair as they came from bathing — it seemed that no detail could be commonplace.

In the evening they sailed west of the Needles, the sea divinely ruffled and lit with wind and sun. The beauty of the flecked sky and a hint of night in the east caught at them. Passion renewed shone in their eyes, passion unthwarted by the small kindness and laughter of the day. Their love could live with fun for company. It had familiarly walked and scrambled with them through the day, only the more surely to put forth wings at a touch.

Then the mood of their excursion changed. The wind rapidly freshened, and soon they rushed in a heeling boat, brightly dashed with spray, exhilarated and shouting to be heard. Miranda

had to strain far back upon the gunwale, hauling hard at the sheet.

Peter wondered whence the breeze so suddenly had come. He looked to the south, and called to Miranda to look. A rain-cloud was advancing towards them, a line of pattering drops clearly cut upon the water.

It struck them suddenly; and Peter at once realised that, though the event was beautiful, he had no time to lose in admiration. They must run. They would have to tack into the Bay; and the wind was continually stronger. Miranda was aware in his orders to her of a strain of impatience and anxiety. She could herself see that the boat was in distress. They raced out to sea, keeping as far as possible from the cruel shore under which they had sailed in the morning.

The strain grew. In the midst of their peril Miranda exulted to feel that Peter knew what to do, and demanded of her an immediate answer to his directions. The knowledge he had playfully given her in the morning steadied them well. She had a glad sense that they were working competently together. Peter felt it too.

He looked grimly to port at the high cliff. Last night he had played with the idea of jumping down. He smiled, seeing that life could be ironical. He set his teeth. He had now no intention of dying. He shouted at Miranda, and rejoiced to see how quickly she took the word:

“Lee Ho!”

They weathered the point, and could now see the light of their house upon the cliff. Almost they were safe. For a time they rushed forward, blinded and drenched with rain and spray; then suddenly the wind was cut off, and it was calm. They were steadily moving towards their moorings in the Bay, and the shower was now pouring straightly out of the sky. The whole world had seemed a welter of water rushing at them from every point. Now it was merely raining, and they were uncomfortable.

Peter looked at Miranda. Her eyes and cheeks shone with excitement out of the bedraggled wreck of her hair. Her clothes clung absurdly about her. He felt the water trickling down his back and chest, and Miranda moved uneasily. She, too, was ridiculously teased.

But Peter's heart was glad. Their quick race under the cruel cliffs had shown him in a vision their life to come. It had given him a comrade at need, a companion for every day, brave and keen, rising above disaster, redeeming life from the peril, discomfort, and ridicule of mischance.

He ran the boat to her moorings, and watched Miranda as she hung over the side to ship the buoy. Her skirt, folded about her, dripped copiously into her shoes. He remembered how, as a boy, he had kissed the hem of her frock. He softly laughed, but wished he had not been so busy with the ropes.

When the boat was still, they looked at one



another and burst into laughter. They were so miserably wet and foolish. Then Peter remembered how the spray had dashed upon the cruel white cliffs as they raced into the Bay; and it made their companionable safety very sweet. He flung his clammy arms about her, kissing her wet face and hair.

Already the lit windows of their house twinkled to the sea, and the moon was beginning to swing her lamp. At midnight she once more lit them preciously together. Then the sun put her out, and another day, kind and beautiful, called them happily to the common round.

THE END









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